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THE STORY OF KING ALFRED

BY

WALTER BESANT

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK AND LONDON
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
1930

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THE STORY OF KING ALFRED.

INTRODUCTION.

I. The Author's Design.

In the following pages I propose to attempt a life of the greatest of all Englishmen that may be procured by all classes of the English people. I shall present a portrait of Alfred without dissertations on the authenticity of episodes or the trustworthiness of biographers. I desire to write such a history of the great king as shall be accessible and instructive to the great body—every year growing greater—of those who read books and wish to be acquainted with the national history. I shall endeavour not to exaggerate the achievements of the king—they want no exaggeration; or to over-state the obligations which the posterity of Alfred owe to his memory—they can hardly be over-stated. The plain and unvarnished story should be sufficient. This attempt is, it will be observed, ambitious. It is far harder to win the confidence of the people at large than to attract the attention of those who use circulating libraries. Most books are written for the latter class; they number a few thousands,

or tens of thousands. I want, on the other hand, this little book to fall into the hands of the Board Schools, of the Continuation Classes, of those who spend their evenings over books from the free libraries, which are rapidly creating a revolution in the thoughts and standards of the people. To the class which maintains the circulating library belongs the moving panorama of modern literature, in which one book follows another, is read, or looked into, and disappears, while even the critics remember nothing of yesterday's books. To this class new books are like the novelties of fashion in the shops; they present combinations always freshly invented, though of old materials; they offer new colours and new styles; they pass away, and are as much forgotten as the fashion of the year before last. There is no such show to those who haunt the free libraries. If a book appeals to them, they do not ask if it is still in the fashion; they read it, they pass it about, they keep it, they read it again. To such as these I dedicate this Life of Alfred, in the hope that they may read with pleasure and continue to read, the story of the great English king, and how he saved England, and made our record of enterprise and success, of freedom, of conquest, of wealth and prosperity, of strength and honour, possible to our kin and easy of accomplishment. They will also read, if they can, how all these achievements were made possible by the tenacity and bull-dog courage of Alfred's people—the men of Wessex, Sussex, and Kent. No king, however great, wise, far-seeing, and resolute, can do more that his people will let him do. He is like an engineer who, with all his science, has in the long run nothing to depend upon but the strength of his materials.

Now, the materials with which Alfred had to work were very strong indeed—strong to obstinacy and blind conservatism.

The Life of Alfred has been of late very much spoken of by the Press: it will be spoken of much more when, in the autumn of this year, the great millenary celebration of the king is held in his venerable capital of Winchester. This book is partly written with a view to the right understanding of the celebration. The whole of the English-speaking race ought to understand why we hold this Function. I desire that all those who read the accounts in the papers of the Function may understand exactly what it means; what manner of man Alfred was; what kind of world he lived in; what he did; why we honour him; why, wherever our language is spoken, we must continue to remember him and to honour him.

There are already many Lives of Alfred, but there is not one, I believe, which is written with this object. There are no new facts in my pages; but there are none in the pages of these other books. The only new features in every new Life of Alfred are the application of modern investigation into the conditions of life in the ninth century. Thus, for instance, in the "Book of Essays on Alfred," published two years ago by Mr. Bowker, the Mayor of Winchester, there was a series of "Studies," based upon modern examination into the condition of England during the ninth century, with no new facts in the actual life of the king. Alfred was considered from various points —those of Religion, Law, War, Education, and Literature. The Essays formed between them the best Life of Alfred yet produced, but the facts

remained the same. We can hardly hope to add to these facts by any new discovery. The Essays were most valuable, not in adding to a record already familiar, but in showing what that record proved and meant. In the following pages I have referred to this book on several occasions. If I have not always acknowledged with gratitude the source of certain paragraphs due to this book, I hope that this general acknowledgment will prove sufficient.

The Introduction to the book consists of an address which I was invited to deliver before the people of Winchester, as preparatory to the first steps towards the celebration. I wish it had been more worthy of the subject. My audience was representative; not only were the scholars and divines of Winchester present, with the notables of the city, but also a large number of working people who filled up the hall. It was with the most lively satisfaction that I found the subject one that would hold and interest this part of the assemblage. If the subject could interest the folk of Winchester, why should it not interest also the larger company of the working class over the whole of the Anglo-Saxon world? I desire to stand before a larger audience in a wider theatre. I desire to fill that theatre with the people to whom at present Alfred is but a name, if even that. I should like, if it were possible, to see before me, in imagination, tier beyond tier, stretching far away in the distance, circle beyond circle, millions of white faces intent upon the story of the English king. If they will listen, my voice will reach to the farthest circle; if they are interested, they will listen. Let me see their faces light up as if touched by sunshine when the in-

terest of the subject fills them; let me see the changes as of passing rain and sunshine on an April day on the faces of this vast audience. Wherever they live, in whatever climate, under whatever name, they own their liberty, which they enjoy unconsciously, as they enjoy the free air of heaven—their peace, order, security, self-government, all of which they accept as if these things came by nature with the harvest and the fruits of the season in due course—to the great and wise King Alfred, whose history every man and woman of the English-speaking race ought to learn, and every boy and girl to know.

I would rather write a book for the people than anything else that the world can offer. He who reaches the heart of the people becomes and continues an abiding force. Truly, his work lives after him—his good work. Think of the influence, for two hundred years and more, of the "Pilgrim's Progress"! What could man desire better than for all these years to be a champion of religious liberty and the sturdy individualism which has done so much for the national character and the national history? It is a great ambition—there can be none greater; the glories that a State can offer—the honour, the distinction, the wealth are insignificant before such an achievement. Let me be permitted to entertain the ambition, even though it is not destined to be fulfilled.

In the name, then, of everything that is dear to us and profitable to us; in the name of godliness, patience, resolution, frankness, wisdom, and self-sacrifice, let us endeavour to make Alfred better known to his great-grandchildren. We are all his great-grandchildren. Our ancestors of a

thousand years ago numbered all the people of Wessex, Kent, and Sussex, and among them the royal line of Cerdic, with Alfred as the common great-grandfather. W. B.

II. The Authorities.

It may be asked at the outset, how we know all these things about Alfred. The sources of our information are many, but the things they tell us are few. First and foremost, there is the "Life of Alfred," by Asser, formerly Bishop of Sherborne. This document, about which there has been much discussion, was the work of a Welsh scholar and ecclesiastic, who was invited by Alfred to join him at his Court to read aloud to him and to advise him in matters literary. Asser's work appears to have been mutilated and altered, or added to in many places, but the greater part was always, undoubtedly, as we have it at the present day. There are many "undesigned coincidences" which prove the genuineness of the work. Thus, Asser was a descendant of the old British race, so goes out of his way to inform his readers of the British names of certain places. He tells us that the island of Thanet was called Ruim; that the village of Snotingaham is called by them Tigguocobane; that Wilton is situated near the ancient Guilon; and that Thornscetan is Durngueis. It is not likely that a forged document would take the trouble to invent these details. Moreover, there is little, except in one or two passages, evidently interpolated and easily detected, which contains legend or tradition. The "Life" is a contemporary document left un-

finished some five or six years before the king's death; the autobiographical parts bear every possible mark of truth; while, scattered here and there, are passages of irrepressible personal admiration and affection.

Thus Asser says—

"Alfred would avail himself of every opportunity to procure coadjutors in his good designs, to aid him in his strivings after wisdom, that he might attain to what he aimed at; and, like a prudent bird, which, rising in summer with the early morning from her beloved nest, steers her rapid flight through the uncertain tracks of ether, and descends on the manifold and varied flowers of grasses, herbs, and shrubs, essaying that which pleases most, that she may bear it to her home, so did he direct his eyes afar, and seek without that which he had not within, namely, in his own kingdom."

And again—

"Thus, like a most productive bee, he flew here and there, asking questions as he went, until he had eagerly and unceasingly collected many various flowers of Divine Scriptures, with which he quickly stored the cells of his mind."

These passages are hardly such as a writer at second hand, or the writer of a forged biography would set down. They have a spontaneous and personal air. From the beginning to the end, indeed, of the document the loyalty of Asser is conspicuous. It is no mere lip-worship that he offers; his love for Alfred is based upon years of the closest personal relations, in which the king's character, his greatness, his disinterested labours, his modesty, his wisdom, his many noble qualities, have become gradually revealed to his private secretary. We could not have chosen a better

biographer, though we might wish for more details, a continuation to the end, and a more carefully arranged Life.

Apart from these points, it is very strong testimony to the truth of this document that it is quoted copiously by the earlier chroniclers, especially Florence of Worcester, who died in 1118, and wrote somewhere about 1100, or two hundred years after Asser. Of course, a great deal may happen in two hundred years. At the same time, the period 900 A.D. to 1100 A.D. can hardly be called one of great literary activity, nor was it a period in which, for no apparent motive, a forged document such as the "Life of King Alfred" was likely to be produced.

Had a pretended Life of Alfred been foisted upon the world, it would have been stuffed with fable, legend, and the attribution of works with which the king had no concern. Alfred speedily became the subject of song and of tradition. In the so-called "Proverbs of King Alfred," there occurs a song—

ALFRED.

"Englene Herd [England's Shepherd]
Englene Darling.
In Enkelonde he was king:
Alfred he was in Enkelonde a king—
Wel swythe strong.
He was king and cleric
Full well he loved God's work:
He was wise in his word,
And war [wary] in his work.
He was the wisest man
That was in England."

There is, next in importance to Asser's "Life," the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. This document was

begun about the year 890; it was used, or consulted, by Asser, who wrote in 893. Its interest becomes really important when it arrives at the reign of Alfred himself. The work is, for the most part, what it purports to be, a mere chronicle, without much comment, of the principal events in each year, often losing, as is the way with such chronicles, the proportion of things, keeping silence where we most desire information, and narrating things with which we are not concerned. It is, however, a record of the highest importance to the students of the age.

The historians and chroniclers who came later are valuable as repeating and enlarging the earlier brief statements.

Lastly, there are the writings of Alfred himself: his translations, his additions, enlargements, and observations, his contributions to geography, his exhortations and introductions, his code of law, and his will. These things furnish many details of the greatest importance in recovering and restoring the Wessex of King Alfred's time.

The facts, I repeat, are scanty. No Life of Alfred can be produced at the present day which adds anything to the facts already known. There is, however, a method of writing biography which may enlarge the work indefinitely. It is to reproduce things which belong to the time rather than the subject. The method has many dangers. For instance, when it is said that Alfred, as a boy, eagerly listened to the poetry of his native tongue, the biographer may go on to quote page after page of this poetry. In this way a biography may be swollen to the dimensions of an encyclopædia. Again, the subject may be treated by

means of separate essays, each presenting the latest results of research. This method has been pursued in Bowker's "Alfred," in which the highest authorities, such as Professor Earle, the Bishop of Bristol, Sir Frederick Pollock, and Mr. Frederic Harrison have contributed essays, such as illustrate in the best sense the work and achievements of Alfred.

My own authorities are the several works—Asser, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the later Chronicles, the works of Alfred, the ordinary books on the Anglo-Saxons, and Pauli's "Life." I have made a few quotations from Bowker's "Alfred," the introduction to which, as I have said, consists of an address delivered at Winchester. I have thought it well in several places to give Asser's own words as regards particular events, and I have quoted the opinions of Freeman, Green, and Harrison on the character and achievements of Alfred.

The later biographies of Alfred, as they cannot contain anything but what is presented in the works mentioned above, may be neglected. I would not be understood as wishing to depreciate their good qualities, but only to point out that he who would attempt a Life of Alfred speedily finds that he gets no help from the later books on the subject, except such as contribute to the knowledge which we already possess of the religion, wars, laws, education, government, and arts of the period.

III. The Genealogy of Alfred and His Descendants.

The Royal House of Wessex was proud of its descent from the heathen gods. Long after they had become Christian they pointed to their descent from Woden. Asser gives the genealogy and descent of Alfred from the beginning of all things. Probably the line is accurately made out as far back as Cerdic. Beyond him, except that he must have been of noble blood, we need not consider this table. Briefly, and leaving out many links of the chain, we have the following:—

Table I.

ADAM TO CERDIC.

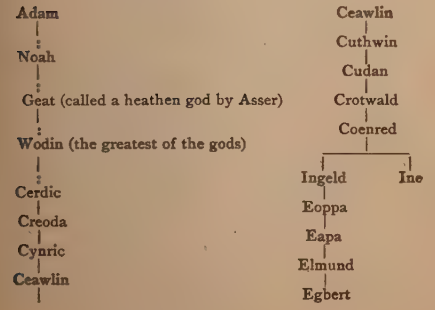


TABLE II.

EGBERT TO ALFRED.

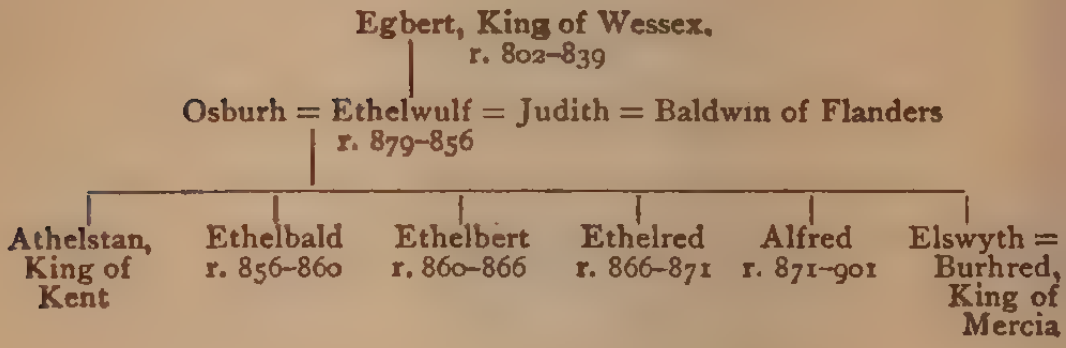


TABLE III.

ALFRED TO MARGARET OF SCOTLAND.

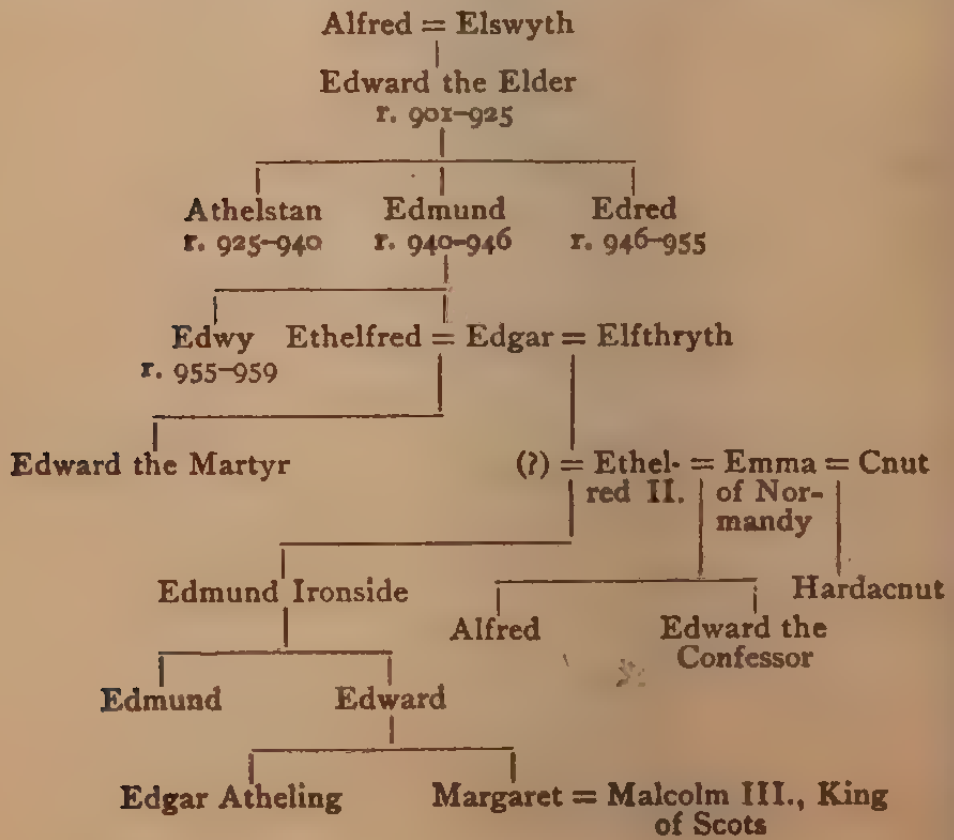


TABLE IV.

DESCENT OF EDWARD VII. FROM ALFRED.

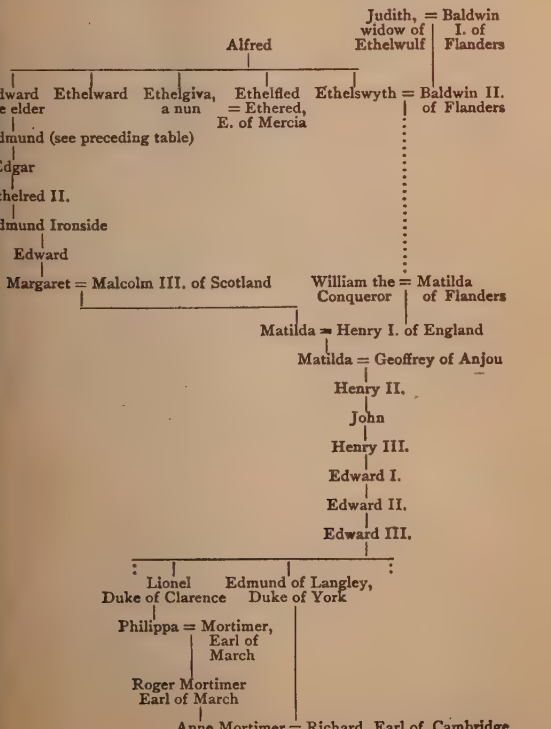
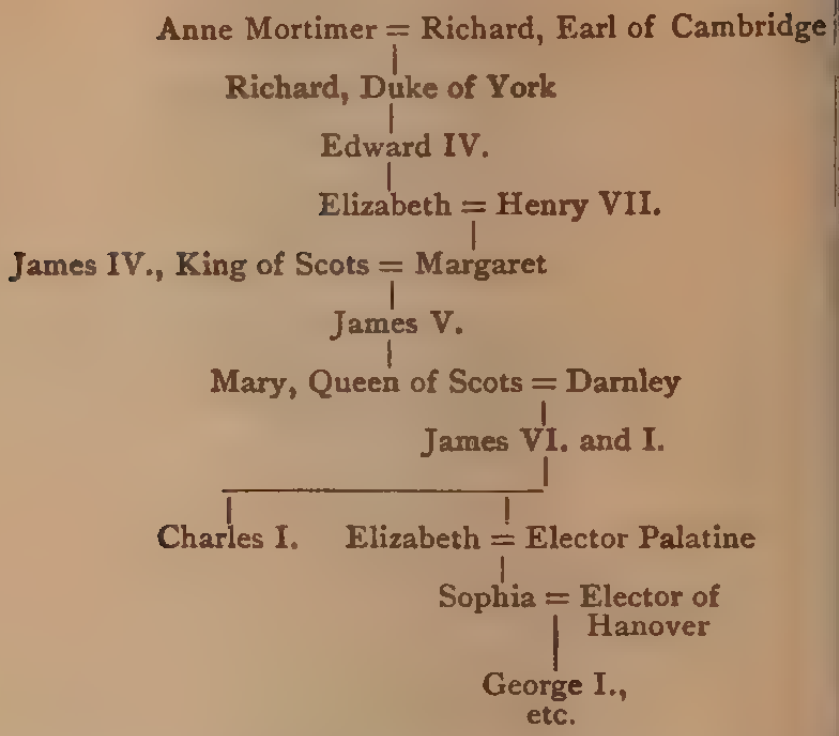


TABLE IV.—*continued.*


Anne Mortimer = Richard, Earl of Cambridge
Richard, Duke of York
Edward IV.
Elizabeth = Henry VII.
James IV., King of Scots = Margaret
James V.
Mary, Queen of Scots = Darnley
James VI. and I.
Charles I.
Elizabeth = Elector Palatine
Sophia = Elector of Hanover
George I., etc.

It is seen, therefore, that our royal family is descended from Alfred by two lines at least. There may be more: one through Judith, widow of Ethelwulf, and one through Margaret, granddaughter of Edmund Ironside.

CHAPTER I.

ENGLAND IN THE NINTH CENTURY.

WHEN from the window of a railway train we gaze upon the broad lands of England, seeing pasture land followed by arable, with small woods on the hillsides, and villages peacefully lying round the venerable churches which sanctify the country; seeing every part of this lovely country

like a garden, enclosed by hedges, planted with trees, under care and cultivation, save here and there an expanse of moorland, of heath, or of barren mountain; seeing the whole land traversed in every direction by high-roads, cross-country roads, railways, and canals;—we do well to ask how the country became so cultivated and so cared for; how long it has been the great and beautiful garden which we now look upon. On investigation, we discover that the present aspect of the land is not two centuries old, and that even in the time of the Stuarts the country presented an appearance and was subject to conditions such that, could we see it as it was then, we should hardly be able to recognize it as we see it now. This appearance, and these conditions, continued and preserved those of a thousand years. Between the England of the ninth century (with which we are here concerned) and that of the seventeenth, there was very little change, except that in the former period the forests covered a larger area, the marshes were more dangerous and more extensive, the villages and towns were more scattered, separate, and isolated.

Lay before you a map of England. Carry yourself back to the ninth century. With a brush and some water colour lay down upon the map the forests, the marshes, the seaboard, the moors, the divisions, provinces, or kingdoms of the country. You will find, first of all, a vast forest beginning with the coast of Kent, where a narrow strip had been cleared, and stretching westward across the country covering a great part of Kent, Surrey, Sussex, Hampshire, and Dorsetshire. This forest, on reaching the borders of the modern Devonshire, turned north, lay all

MAP OF ENGLAND
SHOWING THE
Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms
and
Danish Districts.
English Miles.
0 20 40 60
STRATHCLYDE
NORTHUMBRIA
BERNICIA
Bamburgh
Tyne
Durham
CUMBRIA
DEIRA
Isle of Man
York
Stamford Bridge
Humber
Anglesea
Lincoln
North
MERCIA
Shrewsbury
Lichfield
Leicester
Crowland
Norwich
Ely
EAST ANGLIA
Bury St. Edmunds
WALES
South
Burford
Gloucester
Oxford
ESSEX
Caerleon
LONDON
Bristol
Ashdown
Bristol Channel
Glastenbury
Stonehenge
KENT
WESSEX
Salisbury
Winchester
SUSSEX
Athelney
Hastings
WEST WALES
Isle of Wight
ENGLISH CHANNEL
Normandy
FRANCIA

round Sedgemoor, and covered the greater part of Somerset. On the north of the Thames the Middlesex and Essex forest covered nearly the whole of the former and a large part of the latter, with branches over Willesden and Harrow, and so westward. The middle part of the country, including the shires of Warwick, Worcester, Gloucester, Cheshire, Nottingham, and Derby, was covered by an enormous forest; and Yorkshire, Durham, and Northumberland, save for a broad belt of cultivated land, were also under forest. Moors, again, large and barren, undrained bog and quagmire, lay around and amid the forest—Exmoor, Dartmoor, the Yorkshire moors, the moor of the Peak, Beaulieu Moor, the moors of Middlesex forest, and the Midland moors, of which you may to-day find an example outside the town of Tewkesbury. Of marshland there was also plenty. Along the south coast lay the lagoons of Poole, Christchurch, Southampton, Portsmouth, and Langston, bright and sparkling water at high tide, mud at low; the marshes spread out north and south of the river Thames; and all round the Essex coast; the Fenland, with its hundred miles of marsh and swamp, over which at high tide the waters of the Wash flowed unrestrained, covered a vast area; and another huge marsh at the end of the Humber estuary, into which a dozen rivers flowed, contributing their own sluggish waters to swell every flow of the tide.

The old Roman roads were too well and strongly made to be wholly ruined by neglect. They survive to the present day, hard, compact, and serviceable, but in places they were broken through, perhaps intentionally to stop the ad-

vance of an enemy, and they were nowhere repaired. There was no reason why they should have been repaired, for the towns which they had formerly connected now lay in ruins, and in their stead villages, founded originally for and by a family or a small tribe, were planted on the banks of the rivers and in the midst of the forests. Some connection with the outer world, some intercommunication was necessary, even for the simple village life. The folk wanted metal for weapons and for agricultural implements; they wanted salt for the daily life. Iron and salt were the two chief instruments of keeping open communication, and therefore rendering civilization, joint action, a sense of kinship, possible among these isolated settlements.

The Saxons disliked cities and walled places. It was their desire, following the memory of ancient times upon the Elbe and the Weser, as soon as some kind of peace was established, to settle down upon these clearings and their homesteads, with the central hall, the cottages of the kin, the slaves, and the cattle, and to live out their lives in quiet. Your map of Saxon England, if you examine it more curiously, will be found remarkable for the very small number of towns upon it. Settlements and tribes or families there were in plenty, but few towns. This love of the Saxon for solitary freedom in their farms and clearings should be remembered in reading their history; it was a factor of the highest importance in their wars with the Danes, because it prevented that coalition of the whole people which would have driven out the invaders easily and speedily, and with such loss that they would have come no more.

Tribal and family settlements, however, are not enough to ensure peace and security: there must be common action, and therefore a leader and a council. Not long, therefore, after their settlement in the country, the people found themselves grouping into small and separate nations. Thus the Angles, who first settled in East Anglia—Norfolk and Suffolk—formed one kingdom; another branch of the same tribe crossed the Fen-land, conquered the middle of England, and became another kingdom—that of Mercia; the Jutes, who settled in Kent, created a kingdom of their own; the East Saxons, South Saxons, and West Saxons formed respectively the kingdoms of Essex, Sussex, and Wessex; while in the north two kingdoms were formed, of Bernicia and Deira, afterwards merged into one—that of Northumbria. The conquest of the country, moreover, was never complete. The power of the Britons, it is true, was broken; but many of them remained where they had taken shelter, in the forests. It pleases the antiquary to discover at this day in Sussex the descendants of those Britons who fled, whither the enemy could not follow them, into the great forest of Anderida. Many, no doubt—but this is a disputed point—remained on the soil, were allotted land on conditions, and became the "villains" of aftertime, attached to the ground and unable to leave it. The more generous spirits fought their way manfully, always facing the enemy, and succeeded in establishing themselves in three separate kingdoms, viz. of Strathclyde in Cumberland and Westmoreland, of Wales, and of Cornwall. There was never any peace between the fiery Britons and the Saxon conquerors. Time after time they carried war

across the frontier; time after time they were repulsed, and invaded in their turn. The kingdoms of Cornwall and Strathclyde have long since been absorbed in England. In the former it is said that the traditional hatred of the Saxon still lingers. In Wales itself the people are still Britons in speech, in appearance, in character, and in hereditary, undying hatred of the English.

There are historians who please themselves with finding the remains of Roman institutions surviving the conquest of Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries. Especially do they look for these survivals in London. Their view appears to me perfectly erroneous, and the so-called remains of Roman law and custom in my mind are fanciful and baseless. The invaders made a clean sweep of everything British. The masterful Anglo-Saxon triumphed in everything then as he does now. The Britons that remained on his newly acquired land became slaves or servants; their laws, their rights, their privileges, were all torn from them, and in the next generation were forgotten, and replaced by the laws and customs of the conquerors. Let me refer in illustration to the history of London during the fifth and sixth centuries.

London was essentially a trading town. Under the Romans it advanced to a position equa to that of Bordeaux or Marseilles; but it wa always a trading town. It had its Forum, its imperial offices, its administrative bureaux, it imperial officers, its garrison, its fort: but it wa a trading town. It had its lawyers, poets, rhetoricians, musicians, and artists of all kinds; but i was a trading town. It lived by its trade; it ha little or no cultivated land outside it; all the sup

olies were brought in by river and by road. The seas were protected from pirates by the Roman fleets; the merchants brought their wares across the channel from Calais or Boulogne to the Kentish coast, and so through the strait, long since filled up, between Thanet and the mainland; the exports were brought to the port of London by the Roman roads, by which also the imports were carried into the country for distribution. The provisions of the city came down the river along the fertile valley of the Thames in barges, or up the river from Essex, the garden of Britain, and from Kent. London without these supplies could not exist. She purchased their supplies by her trade. If, therefore, the trade was stopped she must starve; if the roads were blocked she must starve; if the river was in the hands of the enemy she must starve.

All these things happened. First the Roman fleets were withdrawn, and the pirates got possession of the German Ocean and the mouth of the Thames. Therefore the foreign merchants were stopped. There was at first danger of meeting pirates and of fighting them; then the danger became a certainty, and a fight meant capture or death; therefore the ships came no more. As the county was overrun by the enemy, one road after another was blocked, and traffic suspended. Thus the export trade was stopped, and at the same time the supply of provisions to the City was also stopped. Food and the means of procuring food being cut off, what could London do? Nothing. There was no siege; there was no massacre of the people; the Roman fort had been pulled down, and its materials, with all the stone that could be found in the City, were used

up in the construction of the wall. But there were no defenders, and there was no attack; the people rapidly melted away and disappeared; those of the better sort, one understands, carried their families across to France, where they found shelter and a refuge, though with the loss of all their property; the young men went out to join the British armies of defence; the women and children followed, travelling by night and through the woods to escape the enemy. There was nothing left in the city of London except the deserted villas, the churches, the Forum, the bridge, and the wall. In the port and below the bridge there were no ships, on the quay there were no goods, in the market-place there was no trade, in the streets there were no people. The deserted city all day long presented the appearance of a city at sunrise, when the folk are all asleep in their peaceful beds. Only by the riverside there lingered the slaves and their descendants, who fished in the river and hunted in the forest. The trees grew up in the gardens, the ivy crept between the stones and dragged them out, the rain fell upon the tesselated pavements and through the roofs; for a hundred years London lay desolate. When the Saxons took possession at last, where were the institutions and the customs of the Roman occupation? They were clean gone—gone and forgotten. And as with London, so with other towns; they were ruined and deserted all over the country these ruins stood dotted about—they were called Waste Chesters. Here and there a town survived. Chester, Colchester, York, Bath, and a few more preserve portions of their Roman walls; sometimes the walls remain while the town has disappeared, as a

Vroxeter, Silchester, Verulam, Porchester, and Pevensey.

The Saxon conquest, so far as it went—it left, as we have seen, a large part of the country unconquered—was thorough; the Roman civilization was utterly destroyed.

Let me quote on this point the valuable testimony of J. R. Green ("History of the English People," i. p. 24):—

"What strikes us at once in the new England is, that it was the one purely German nation that rose upon the wreck of Rome. In other lands, in Spain, or Gaul, or Italy, though they were equally conquered by German peoples, religion, social life, administrative order, still remained Roman. In Britain alone Rome died into a vague tradition of the past. The whole organization of government and society disappeared with the people who used it. The villas, the mosaics, the coins which we dig up in our fields are no relics of our English fathers, but of a Roman world which our fathers' sword swept utterly away. Its law, its literature, its manners, its faith went with it. The new England was a heathen country. The religion of Wodin and Thunder triumphed over the religion of Christ. Alone among the German assailants of Rome the English rejected the faith of the Empire they helped to overthrow. Elsewhere the Christian priesthood served as mediators between the barbarian and the conquered, but in the conquered part of Britain Christianity wholly disappeared. River and homestead and boundary, the very days of the week, bore the names of the new gods who displaced Christ. But if England seemed for the moment a waste from which all the civilization of the world had fled away, it contained within itself the germs of a nobler life than that which had been destroyed. The base of the new English society was the freeman whom we have seen tilling, judging, or sacrificing for himself in his far-off fatherland by the Northern Sea. However roughly he dealt, while the struggle went on, with the material civilization of Britain, it was impossible that

such a man could be a mere destroyer. War was no sooner over than the warrior settled down into a farmer, and the home of the peasant churl rose beside the heap of goblin-haunted stones that marked the site of the villa he had burnt. Little knots of kinsfolk drew together in "tun" and "ham" beside the Thames and the Trent, as they had settled beside the Elbe or the Weser, not as kinsfolk only, but as dwellers in the same plot, knit together by their common holding within the same bounds. Each little village commonwealth lived the same life in Britain as its farmers had lived at home. Each had its moot hill or sacred tree as a centre, its "mark" as a border; each judged by witness of the kinsfolk, and made laws in the assembly of its freemen, and chose the leaders for its own governance, and the men who were to follow headman or ealdorman to hundred court or war."

The "kingdoms," of which the list has been given, were not arbitrary divisions of the land: they were in all cases natural divisions. The invaders did not say, "Let us make a kingdom and call it Kent." Not at all; they settled in a place, they extended their settlement by conquest. They arrived at certain natural boundaries, and their kingdom was made by them. Thus the Angles who settled in Norfolk and Suffolk, extending their holding inland, found themselves surrounded on the north and east by the sea: on the west they discovered the fen country, unfit for cultivation, impossible for the passage of armies, and inhabited by a fierce people who knew how to get about among the morass and marsh which, except for its islets such as Ely, was covered with water whenever the tide was more than usually high; on the south side they were stopped by the estuary and the river Stour. Thus their kingdom was defined for them.

In the same way Mercia, the Land of the 'elsh March, conquered by another band of the ngles, was contained within the western border y the Welsh mountains, which they could never old, and by the river Severn; on the south by ie river Thames; on the east by the Fens; and n the north by the moors and forests.

So, also, Kent was kept in narrow limits by sea nd forest; and Wessex—the kingdom of Alfred nd his ancestors—by Dartmoor and Exmoor, edgemoor, and the forests of Somerset on the est, by the Forest of Andred's Weald on the ast, and by the Thames on the north.

These boundaries, one must remember, were ot always strictly laid down; they were shifted rom time to time, but, roughly speaking, they ere the natural divisions of the country, and hey may be remembered as the chief cause, ogether with the absence of roads, which led to he formation of so many kingdoms.

The process of making a realm was simple. The tribe was first considered, *e.g.* Jute and South Saxon did not mix and intermarry for many years. Then the area of occupation determined the extent of the tribal power. It is true that all these kingdoms belonged to the same race—Angle, Jute, and Saxon were closer than cousins—but kinship became forgotten. By its position each kingdom had its own work to do, if it would only do it. To Mercia belonged, by the law of her situation, the duty of keeping the Britons of Wales from getting back to the plains; to Northumbria that of keeping quiet the Britons of Cumberland and of driving back the Picts and Scots; to East Anglia the defeat of pirates; to Wessex a watch over the Britons of

Cornwall and the pirates of the south, and so on. The special work thus laid upon them assisted in the separation of the nations. Their language, which at first was the same, or nearly the same—for the Mercian and the Anglian it was at first exactly the same—changed continually and on different lines, so that after a few generations the man of Mercia could not understand the man of East Anglia, and the men of Wessex could not understand the men of Northumbria. This diversity of *patois* prevailed for many centuries; even at the present day the Norfolk peasant could not understand the Northumbrian or the Dalesman of Yorkshire, until the schools came—the schools which destroy the country speech, talked in a way that, outside their own county, was not understood by any. Then new customs were introduced; new conditions demanded new laws; each nation grew more "foreign" to all the others; federation became every year a dream of the few who were wise enough to understand the forces and the tendencies of the time. King, thanes, and people everywhere looked for nothing more than continual war with the other nations of the island first, and with raiders and invaders next. Nothing but the most terrible of all lessons—defeat, conquest, devastation, the burning of the homestead, murder, rapine, slavery—was able to enforce upon the people the absolute necessity of coalition and alliance. The same difficulty, the same inclination to fly apart, the same efforts, on the part of the leaders, to make a small independence, at the expense of everybody else, plagued the country and all other countries of Western Europe for nearly a thousand years to come;

ven until the Wars of the Roses finally made ich attempts on the part of the English barons enceforward hopeless and impossible.

All these things have to be remembered when e begin to consider England of the ninth cenary. The fact that the country was divided into even or eight Saxon kingdoms, and at least three ndependent states of Britons, must be borne in nind, together with the causes of that unfortuate division and its dangers; it must also be reembered that these petty states, which look so mall upon the modern map, were in reality far maller a thousand years ago, by reason of the ncultivated and unsettled lands—the forests, noors, marshes, and barren hillsides—which ormed the greater part of the country.

Out of all these kingdoms three became the nost powerful, and from time to time carried a oose kind of supremacy over all the rest; these vere the kingdoms of Northumbria, Mercia, and Vessex. I cannot dwell in this place on the nistory of the successive supremacy of these ealms; the history may be read in the books of many writers. It is sufficient to note that Egbert, King of Wessex, was the last to estabish his supremacy and to become the "Bretwald" or King-in-Chief of England before the coming of the Norsemen overthrew for a time all order, rule, and civilization in the whole of Saxon England.

One point more before we leave the conquest of Britain by the Saxons. It used to be alleged that this conquest was only rendered possible by the effeminacy of the Britons. Nothing could be more untrue and more unjust. The period is obscure, the traditions are confused, and the

statements are inaccurate; but it is quite certain that the Britons fought with the utmost courage and tenacity. As for effeminacy, the country had for generations been drained of its young men, who were carried off for soldiering by the Romans, and never returned. Their loss certainly affected the population, and probably deprived the country of many thousands of defenders. The chief cause of the Saxon success was the separation of the cities into independent communities. The Britons could not for a long time learn the lesson of combined action; when they understood it was already too late. Five hundred years later these conquerors were in their turn conquered, because they also had been unable to learn, or had learned very imperfectly, the lessons which they had enforced upon their enemies, the Britons.

The history of the Anglo-Saxons in England between the fifth and the ninth century is a continuous record of war. We ask ourselves if there was to be found anywhere in the country a quiet homestead which had not been ravaged by war, or had not sent out its sons to perish on the field of battle. First there was the war of conquest; the Saxons slowly and steadily advanced, driving back the enemy, who slowly, but steadily, receded. This war raged along the west line of occupation, leaving the east free and secure; thus the settlements along the east coast grew and flourished, with no enemies to fear, for four hundred years. No one knows even when they were first founded; in the opinion of some there were Saxon settlements in these coasts, and communications with the Frisian lands long before the legendary arrival of Hengist and Horsa.

Save when civil war broke out, these settlements were peaceful; the people in their quiet farms forgot their old seamanship, ceased to build ships, became Christians, and, in the English manner, practical and thorough Christians, according to their lights.

At first sight it would appear as if peace and security had been granted to the land—a respite from war and the invader—for some four hundred years. But there were continual wars between the kingdoms of the island. We read of kings and nobles laying down crown and sword and entering into monasteries. The success of the Scandinavian raiders is even attributed to the desertion of the people by their leaders. However that may be, there was war without respite, war continually. If a princeling on a throne entered the monastery, it was in search of that peace which he might find within, but would not hope to find without. Certainly there was never a time of peace in which a man might with an easy conscience hang up his battle-axe and retire to the nearest convent with the conviction that the devil was dead, and that there would be no more need for his strong right arm and his coat of mail.

Meantime, in spite of war, Saxon England advanced in everything. Learning flourished and was held in honour; there was a learned clergy within and without the monasteries; there was a noble literature in verse; music and singing were the accomplishments learned by every one; the arts, especially in gold and silver work, were practised with great success; the Anglo-Saxon ladies' embroidery was prized over the whole of Europe; the illuminated MSS. which remain attest the

skill of the limner; the warriors were clad in mail, and carried weapons of the finest and best; the civilization of the people was fully equal to that of any other country of Western Europe.

In matters of religion, the Englishman, when he was converted, accepted whatever the bishops taught him. The Pope was the universal Pontiff. He was therefore a person of the highest holiness and sanctity of life. The saints were powerful in intercession; relics worked miracles; indeed, miracles were perpetually vouchsafed for the strengthening of faith and the punishment of the guilty—witness the story of the martyr saint, the boy king Kenelm, whose murder was miraculously communicated to the Pope in Council, whose body was found in consequence, whose guilty stepmother was by a miracle deprived of sight while the boy's coffin was borne through the street. The people accepted, apparently without a murmur, the most severe penance; they obeyed the orders of the priests, and, above all things, they loved to go on pilgrimage. Pilgrimage, indeed, combined everything that can be desired. There was the marvel of foreign travel, the tramp day by day, which led the pilgrims from one convent, which entertained him, to another. Every convent had things remarkable—relics especially. There were the towns, all so much alike and so different; there was the uncertainty of the distance; there was the companionship of the other pilgrims—a cheerful and happy companionship; there were the adventures by the way—stories of robbers and murderers and wild beasts; frightful mountains to cross; and, when they arrived, the religious duties to be performed at the sacred shrines.

Rome appears to have been the most common object of early English pilgrimage. Rome was the sacred city. To Rome embassies went every year from England bearing gifts for the Pope. It was to Rome that many of the kings and nobles retired when age fell upon them, so that they might die on hallowed ground. Every year large bands of English men and women set out on pilgrimage to Rome. But as time went on the pilgrimage to Rome was extended to the Holy Land, and among the crowds of pilgrims who thronged to Palestine and Jerusalem before the Crusades, many came from England. One of the pilgrims who wrote an account of his journey was Willebald, Bishop of Eichstädt. He was an Englishman by birth, and was brought up in a monastery, and dedicated to the life of religion. When he had arrived at manhood, he persuaded his father, his brother Wunebald, and his sister Walpurga, to accompany him, with a large retinue of servants and followers, on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In Italy his father died, and his brother and sister left him. But he went on, and wrote an account of Jerusalem and the holy places. At the same time Arnulphus the Pilgrim, who was shipwrecked on the coast of Scotland, spent the winter in dictating a history of his journey to the Abbot Adamnanus, who drew from the pilgrim's description a plan of the Holy Sepulchre. Both the description of the journey and the plan remain to this day, as they were committed to writing by Adamnanus and used by Bede for the instruction and the encouragement of the faithful.

The English, then, loved the emotions of religion, whether in the adoration of relics, the performance of pilgrimage, the making of presents

to the Pope, the creation of local saints, or the solemn service of the Church. They were not so far advanced in the Christian virtues as in the Christian faith. Their new religion did not cure them of their prevailing vice of drunkenness, which indeed affected priest as much as layman. But it has always been found easier for the proselyte to change his faith than to change his life. All we can expect is that wherever the Christian religion is professed, there will be found some who understand and attempt the Christian life.

The chief occupations of the people were, naturally, the provision of food, warmth, shelter, and clothing. They had vast numbers of swine roaming in the forests; they had cattle and sheep, poultry of all kinds; they fished in the sea and in the streams; they grew herbs; they made butter and cheese; they kept bees; they salted meat for the winter; they drank ale, mead, morat (from mulberries and honey), and wine made by themselves; they used in the better houses candles of wax. They knew how to weave stuffs of linen and of wool; they imported silk; they made leather from skins; they worked in metals; they could make gold and silver wire; they were bell-founders; they were armourers; they made weapons of all kinds. Let us remember, when we think of the country life—there was but little town life—of the Saxon, that everything wanted for the daily consumption was made in the house—the weaving and making of clothes; the building and roofing and repairs; carpenters' work and blacksmiths' work; baking and brewing; dairy work; salting and pickling; the cultivation of grain, fruit, herbs, and vegetables; hunting and snaring; wood-cutting and charcoal-burning;

the making of weapons and of tools; not to speak of the luxuries—the fine silks and cloths, the foreign wines, spices, and oil from abroad—which could be purchased in exchange for skins and slaves, iron, lead, and tin.

One may reasonably believe that the necessity for federation, in order to put an end to internecine quarrels and for purposes of defence, was slowly becoming apparent to the various "nations" of England. The readiness with which the supremacy of Egbert was acknowledged points to a perception of this fact, while the anarchy which reigned in Northumbria and in Mercia should have made the thanes anxious to put the whole country into the hands of one strong ruler. Unfortunately, the invasion of the Norsemen came too soon, while the federation of the tribes was as yet only understood as a thing of the future by a few, and had not even been imagined by the many.

There were two distinct and separate classes of invaders, though the Chronicle puts them together and calls them all alike, "Danes," the "heathen," and the "army." The first who came were the men of Norway. They followed two lines of route—one by way of the Shetlands and Orkneys to the Hebrides and Ireland, the other across the German Ocean to the east coast of England. They landed, and perhaps formed small settlements on the coasts of Northumbria, Norfolk, Essex, and Kent. For the most part they were content to plunder and to carry off all they could seize, thinking it no indignity to run away if the enemy appeared in force. Their object was plunder and not battle, but even for the sake of the former they would not always risk the latter.

The men of Norway came from the Scandinavian peninsula, from Iceland, and from the isles of the Baltic; they lived in a cold and harsh climate, with a barren soil and stormy seas. But for their raids and pillage they would have lived a life of austere simplicity; by means of their raids they were warmly clad, well armed, and provided with plenty of all kinds. England lay between the two main branches of the pirates. One branch harried the east coast; the other settled for a time in Ireland, swarmed in the Irish Channel, and incited the Welsh of Strathclyde, Cornwall, and Wales to join with them in attacking the Saxons.

The alliance of the Vikings—the men of the Creeks—with the Britons was at first the greatest danger. They were met, they were defeated, and the following year saw them again in the field. Egbert himself fought the united armies at Hengestdun and scattered them. His son Ethelwulf fought them at Charmouth, and drove them back into the mountains in Wales. These repeated defeats seemed to discourage them. When Ethelwulf retired to his little realm of Kent, he left the country in comparative peace.

It was only a brief respite. The raids of the Norsemen were to assume another and a far more dangerous form. They were taken up by the Danes—Scandinavians, like the men of Norway, but much more numerous, apparently better equipped for war, equally warlike, and equally intent on plunder. By this time the Danes had occupied much of the territory deserted by the Frisian folk on their migration to England. Like their predecessors, they were borne upon a wave of popular enthusiasm to invade and attack coun-

tries more fertile and more sunny than their own. The movements of the "army," as it is called in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, show that they were driven out to seek their fortunes by one of those singular impulses which formerly seized upon whole races and whole tribes. Wave after wave the peoples had rolled westward across Europe from the east; the last waves were those which carried the Saxons into England, the Danes into England and France, and drove the Normans to wander and to conquer over the whole of Europe, and even to the south of the Mediterranean. In the conquest of England by the Danes, we read over again the conquest of Britain by the Saxons, but happily with a different ending to that adventure.

The Danes came over, not in small flocks of a dozen or twenty ships, but with a cloud of ships carrying thousands of warriors, well-armed and eager for the enjoyment of a country far richer, sunnier, and more fertile than their own inhospitable coasts. Every Dane had heard of this land. It was flowing with milk and honey; it was fertile, cultivated, full of farms stocked with horses, cattle, sheep, and swine; half covered with forests, in which were deer, wild boars, creatures and birds of all kinds for the hunter; the home of luxuries and comforts depicted in lovely colours for the inflammation of the imagination. The panegyric of the Greek orator was doubtless, though in other words, passed from lip to lip, repeated over and over again in the cold and dark evenings of the Baltic winter, while the cheeks of the young men glowed, and their hearts beat high with yearning for the possession of that land, and the battle which was to give it to them. What said

the Greek orator? "Oh! Fortunate Britannia! Thee hath nature deservedly enriched with the choicest blessings of heaven and earth. Thou neither feelest the excessive colds of winter nor the scorching heats of summer. Thy harvests reward thy labours with so vast an increase as to supply thy tables with bread and thy altars with wine. Thy woods have no savage beasts; no serpents harbour there to hurt the traveller. Innumerable are thy herds of cattle and the flocks of sheep, which feed thee plentifully and clothe thee richly. And thy days are long, and no night passes without some glimpse of light."

The Danes or Scandinavians were, like the men of Norway, akin to the Saxons, Jutes, and Angles. Many of their institutions and customs were common to all these peoples; but the feeling of kinship, it is certain, did not avail to prevent war among themselves in the conquest and seizure of lands belonging to each other. War did not recognise kin, nor would it now: there is, however, no kinship among the nations, except for the two great divisions of the Anglo-Saxon race. The French, Spanish, and Italians are, it is true, Latin races, but that implies a remote and imperfect tie of kindred. When we read of the wars between Mercia and Northumbria, or between Wessex and Mercia, we may remember that it is only a year or two since, for party purposes, not even for material interests, or for any advantage that might follow—for party purposes only, the then President of the United States nearly plunged the two Anglo-Saxon communities into war. We are, therefore, after all these centuries, little better than the English of the ninth century.

The feeling of kinship, therefore, had no re-

straining force, nor did it, I believe, so much as exist among the Danes and Scandinavians. They were, it must be acknowledged, a very long way behind their English cousins in civilization; nor would their relationship concern us but for the interesting fact that the three conquests of Britain—Saxon, Danish, and Norman—were practically by the same people. One of the reasons why the Danes and the Normans easily settled down to the customs of the country which they overran was that so many of the laws and customs were already their own.

The Dane still worshipped the old gods; he regarded the Englishman as a renegade from the ancient faith; he had recently suffered persecution, or heard of recent persecution, at the hands of the Christians; he therefore killed all priests, monks, and nuns; he destroyed churches with avidity, and was never so happy as when he had plundered a monastery, murdered the religious, and saw with joy the flames of chapel and refectory, chapterhouse and directory, rising up in mockery to the heavens.

He was a pirate by profession. Every young man of family had his ship and his ship's crew. He crossed the German Ocean, preying upon the ships he met with, and landing on the coast, not to settle, but to harry and plunder and sail away again. He was admirably armed; his plundering raids gave him either weapons or the means of buying them. He was clad in armour, and was therefore greatly superior on the field of battle to the Saxon rustic, who had nothing but a pike or a bill. He understood, moreover, what the English did not—the fortification of a camp and the construction of a ditch. His ships were built with a

skill which surprises us as we gaze upon the craft which have survived the centuries. They were seventy feet long, and more; they could carry a large number of warriors; their low free-board was made safe by the shields of the ship's company; they carried one sail only, and the crew rowed when the wind was not favourable; they were swift either in rowing or sailing; they had a very light draught, such as would enable them to be run into the narrow and shallow streams which offered the only access into the interior. They carried no more provisions than were necessary for the voyage, for the crew lived upon the country where they landed; they carried no horses, but seized on all that they could find.

Among all the fierce fighting men of the time the Dane was the fiercest. He was governed by the most cruel and the most narrow notions of savage warfare. The historians show him to have been ruthless to the last degree; he was without pity for his prisoners and captives. The men whom he spared became his slaves; the women, even the daughters of king and noble, he treated with greatest possible shame and the most cruel humiliation, throwing them to the common soldiers. He had no pity for himself; he encouraged himself in the contempt for death—all peoples at a certain stage do this. The Dane did more—he encouraged himself in the contempt for pain. His histories record the most amazing stories of things which he endured apparently without a murmur, as when a noble prisoner was offered the choice of death by burning or marriage with the king's daughter, and preferred to die at the stake. And even after his conversion to Christianity, he looked forward with joy-

ful anticipation to an eternity of fighting and feasting.

At first, like the men of Norway, who probably accompanied them, the Danes avoided battles, preferring to plunder and to hurry away than to risk their booty in a battle. But the weak and defenceless condition of England, divided as it was into so many little kingdoms, simply invited them to stay and settle. Then their army ceased to return to Denmark in the autumn; they drew up their ships, fortified their camp, and went into winter quarters. In the spring more ships came with reinforcements, and the Danes again spread themselves over the country.

At the beginning of Alfred's reign, then, we find the Danes in possession of the Isle of Thanet —that is to say, commanding the Thames and the whole of Kent and Essex. The whole of Northumbria was in their hands; they had a permanent camp at York; they had ravaged the midland and eastern countries; they had fortified camps between the Severn and the Thames; there remained as yet to the Saxon nothing but the south—only Alfred's kingdom of Wessex, with a part of Surrey, Sussex, and Kent.

This was the situation when Alfred was born; during his days of boyhood and when he mounted a throne so full of peril, so tottering, so threatened, everything was destroyed—order, peace, religion; all the priests and monks who could not fly were murdered; learning, arts, freedom, safety —nothing was left to the unhappy land, except terror, blackened ruins and the memory of peace.

CHAPTER II.

CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION.

ALFRED was the fifth son of Ethelwulf, King of the West Saxons. His genealogy, as important for the Royal House in the ninth as in the twentieth century, has been already set forth at length (see p. 19), with the chain which connects our King Edward VII. with Alfred, Cerdic, and the great god Wodin.

Alfred was born at the town or village of Wantage in Berkshire. His birth took place in the year 849. The town still preserves a traditional memory of his birthplace in an enclosure called the High Garden, said to have been the site of the ancient palace, and in the name of an orchard, called the Court Close. There seems to be no reason for disbelieving the tradition. Wantage has been occupied continuously since the time of Alfred, and the people were not likely to lose the memory of so great a king, their most illustrious townsman. Outside the town there is a doubtful tradition attached to a basin of water fed by springs called King Alfred Bath.

The country round Wantage consists mainly of barren downs and chalk hills, on which are numerous "castles" or forts of earthwork, and moats constructed by the Britons, and speaking of the struggle in which the unfortunate people were slowly driven westward. That struggle had been happily completed two hundred years before the arrival of Alfred, though there were still tracts of land in the possession of the Britons, and still raids and incursions on the part of this

people. All that Alfred heard about the history of the war was a confused tradition of long and victorious fighting; the legends and the poetry and the glory of the war fell to the lot of the defeated, who, as generally happens, consoled themselves with the legends and achievements of Uther Pendragon, King Arthur and his valiant knights, for the defeats which cooped them up in Wales and Cornwall. There was no King Arthur among the Saxons.

Alfred's mother was Osburh, daughter of Oslac, butler or cupbearer to King Ethelwulf, descended from the same line as the king himself, through the nephew of Cerdic. His ancestors had possessed themselves of the Isle of Wight after the slaughter at Carisbrook of all the people who could not escape.

It is remarkable that the further back history penetrates into the obscurity of the past, the deeper is the gulf, the more marked is the separation, between the noble class and the ceorls. Since men began to unite for purposes of protection, there has never been a time, discernible at least, when there was not a caste of nobles. They were always the king's men, with privileges of their own such as make rank a real thing, holding their rank and privileges on the condition of fighting for king and country. They were the nucleus of a standing army and the champions of their people. It must not be supposed that they were at any time, unless at a time of decay, a *fainéant* class. On the contrary, they maintained their position with the most desperate courage, even under the most adverse circumstances. If, as has been said, the first king was a victorious soldier, then the first nobles were the men who fought

under his banner; they were a kind of knights bannerets created on the field: they were enriched with the spoils of war—the wealth of the conquered. The greatest incentive to fierce fighting among the nobles was the certainty that defeat would lead to the loss of everything that makes life tolerable—independence, position, wealth. It is true that these fighting men imagined a heaven where they could fight all day and feast all night, but, like every other kind of heaven, it was not in prospect half so desirable as the present joys of earth.

Nothing is known about Osburh beyond the vague reports of Asser and others. She is credited with the knowledge of those arts and accomplishments which all the Saxon ladies possessed, and with the piety which belonged to most of them. The Teutonic respect for women was nowhere more marked than in England: we cannot doubt that she enjoyed, not only as a great lady, but also as a woman, the highest possible consideration. One would wish to know more about her, but it was enough for a woman in that age to be the mother of children, the faithful wife, the head of the household, the ruler of her maidens and serving-women, the directress of her son's early education; that Osburh was also the adviser and counsellor of her husband, we may very well believe. Into the rest we need not inquire.

Let me quote Asser on Alfred's childhood—

"He was loved by his father and mother, and even by all the people, above all his brothers, and was educated altogether at the court of the king. As he advanced through all the years of infancy and youth, his form appeared more comely than that of his brothers; in look, in

speech, and in manners he was more graceful than they. His noble nature implanted in him from his cradle a love of wisdom above all things, but, with shame be it spoken, by the unworthy neglect of his parents and nurses, he remained illiterate even till he was twelve years old or more; but he listened with serious attention to the Saxon poems which he often heard recited, and easily retained them in his docile memory. He was a zealous practiser of hunting in all its branches, and hunted with great assiduity and success; for skill and good fortune in this art, as in all others, are among the gifts of God, as we also have often witnessed.

"On a certain day, therefore, his mother was showing him and his brothers a Saxon book of poetry, which she held in her hand, and said, 'Whichever of you shall the soonest learn this volume shall have it for his own.' Stimulated by these words, or rather by the Divine inspiration, and allured by the beautifully illuminated letter at the beginning of the volume, he spoke before all his brothers, who, though his seniors in age, were not so in grace, and answered, 'Will you really give that book to one of us, that is to say, to him who can first understand and repeat it to you?' At this his mother smiled with satisfaction, and confirmed what she had before said. Upon which the boy took the book out of her hand, and went to his master to read it, and in due time brought it to his mother and recited it.

"After this he learned the daily course, that is, the celebration of the Hours, and afterwards certain psalms, and several prayers, contained in a certain book which he kept day and night in his bosom, as we ourselves have seen, and carried about with him to assist his prayers, amid all the bustle and business of this present life. But, sad to say! he could not gratify his most ardent wish to learn the liberal arts, because, as he said, there were no good readers at that time in all the kingdom of the West Saxons.

"This he confessed, with many lamentations and sighs, to have been one of his greatest difficulties and impediments in this life, namely, that when he was young and had the capacity for learning, he could not

find teachers; but, when he was more advanced in life, he was harassed by so many diseases unknown to all the physicians of this island, as well as by internal and external anxieties of sovereignty, and by continual invasions of the pagans, and had his teachers and writers also so much disturbed, that there was no time for reading. But yet among the impediments of this present life, from infancy up to the present time, and, as I believe, even until his death, he continued to feel the same insatiable desire of knowledge, and still aspires after it."

The story is impossible because, as we shall see immediately, Osburh was dead long before Alfred was twelve years of age, and his brothers, at that time of his life, were already kings and fighting men. But some such story is possible, that is to say, the strong desire to possess a beautiful book, adorned with coloured illuminations—then a most rare and costly object—may very well have fired a child's imagination and first inspired him with the love of learning which afterwards so greatly distinguished him. It is not a common story; it does not belong to any other king, prince, or country; it is not a piece of folk-lore; on the other hand, it is of no importance whatever, except in indicating, by this fanciful legend, the early leaning of Alfred towards learning and letters. We may find also in the story a tradition of Osburh's love for learning, and her desire that her children should be educated.

It has been suggested that instead of Osburh we should read Judith, the child-wife of the old King Ethelwulf. But here, again, dates do not allow of this substitution. When Alfred was in his seventh year, Ethelwulf was married to Judith. In his ninth year Ethelwulf died; in his eleventh year Judith went back to France.

The story might possibly be told of Alfred by the substitution of St. Swithin's name for that of Osburh. Bishop Swithin died when Alfred was in his thirteenth year. In that case we should have to take the "brothers" as meaning the companions of the boy. This seems a reasonable theory, if it is at all necessary to account for the story, or to find out how far it is true.

We may very well believe, without question, the truth of Asser's statement, that the boy Alfred listened with rapt attention to the Saxon poems. Many boys did so who showed no results from their listening in an after-harvest of literature. Also that the boy became a great hunter. It was a large part of the winter amusements to listen to the minstrel, or the "glee-man," reciting or chanting his songs to the music of the harp, while not to know the science of hunting and to follow its practice would have been unworthy of an English gentleman.

The royal race of Wessex were descended from Cerdic, and through him, from the sun-god Wodin, who ruled over heaven from his palace in Asgard, and over earth from that of Valhalla. Long after their conversion to Christianity the people were proud of the royal descent from Wodin. From father to son they were stout and stalwart fighting men, wise in counsel, and bold in action. The chief duty of the king in those times of continual warfare was to lead in battle as well as to direct the fight. He stood in the forefront, armed with his great battle-axe, and clad in mail. In the long list of battles which fills the pages of the Chronicle, the number of kings slain shows that they were captains in action as well as generals in design. It must be borne in mind that

only a strong and well-built frame could thus fight; a weakling could not possibly become a king. The record of Alfred's battles, his persistence, his disregard of fatigue, his apparent immunity from wounds in battle indicate clearly a physique of the strongest and toughest kind. He was afflicted, we are told, with a painful disorder. Whatever it was, it had no weakening effect. Alfred, to the very end, was the fighting man first and foremost.

The town of Wantage was a royal vill, that is to say, one of the residences of the king. A royal vill was one of the many places where the king held his court, journeying from one to the other, receiving rents and dues paid in kind for want of money, of which there was not much in the land. Among other royal vills of Wessex besides Wantage, were Winchester, Chippenham, Reading, Sherborne, Wimborn, Southampton, "Dene," "Leonaford," and others. The court arrived at a royal vill, stayed there while the revenues, in the shape of provisions, lasted, and then went on to another. The situation of the vills is sometimes instructive. Thus, when we find, among the royal vills of Mercia, many places in the east of the country, as Bensington, Offley, Berkhampstead, Bedford, and Hitchin, we are reminded of the continual troubles and fighting on the Welsh March, and, in the same way, certain conclusions might be arrived at from the position of the royal vills of Wessex.

The actual extent of the Wessex kingdom included the under-kingdoms of Kent and the South Saxons. It stretched, therefore, from Dartmoor on the west to the sea-coast of Kent in the east; was bounded by the sea on the south, and the

river Thames on the north, not taking into account the shadowy supremacy which ceased to be real with the death of Egbert.

Wessex, of all the Saxon kingdoms, was the most advanced in all the arts—in religion, learning, and all that we call civilization. The manner of life among the better sort was largely influenced by the example of the Franks across the Channel. There was a more settled order—there was less anarchy, there was more cultivation, and there was greater security from enemies. Its kings carried war into Cornwall, and so kept down the Britons. The coast was vulnerable and open to pirates, but there was little fear of them until the ninth century; access to the Continent was easy; the land was defended on the landward side by forests and rivers. It was, however, a very small part of the country that was actually settled and cultivated. Alfred's kingdom was but a tiny realm of no apparent consequence—thinly populated, sparsely settled—yet has it made its enduring mark wherever the Anglo-Saxon language is spoken.

While the boy was still a child he lost his mother. It is not known when or how Osburh died, but it was before Alfred was four years of age, unless the tradition is true that Osburh was divorced by her husband, and lived for many years afterwards, dying in one of her son Alfred's religious houses. But life in the ninth century was shorter and more uncertain than in the twentieth. Let us believe that Osburh died comparatively young.

In 853 he was sent by his father to Rome, being taken there by Bishop Swithin (or Swithun, as it is now customary to write his name), who

also carried many costly gifts to the pope. The reason why the child was sent there is not apparent; not, certainly, to put him in a place of safety, because there was no immediate danger in Wessex. Probably it was in order that he might obtain some special blessing from the "Supreme Pontiff," whom Ethelwulf recognized. Whatever the reason, the child was anointed by the pope, and adopted as his spiritual son. It is sometimes stated that he was recognized as future King of Wessex. This, however, is clearly impossible; first, because the pope did not claim the right of electing kings, and next, because there was not the slightest reason for supposing that his four elder brothers would all die young. One would be inclined rather to consider the anointing, if it took place, as part of a form of adoption by which the children of kings were received by the pope as his spiritual sons. The date of Alfred's arrival at Rome has been happily established by the discovery of a letter written by the pope, Leo IV., in the year 853, to King Ethelwulf, announcing the safe arrival of the child.

It is remarkable, in connection with this design for protecting Alfred, to note that among the English Christians there had never been any doubt or wavering as to the personal sanctity of the pope. Probably such scandals and rumours as had already gathered about successive pontiffs were unknown in this distant land. There had been a continuous stream of pilgrims every year to Rome. There was a school at Rome for the instruction of English clergy. Two of the West Saxon kings, Cædwall and Ine, had retreated to Rome, there to live out the remainder of their days. Ethelwulf himself, during the whole of

his life, ardently desired to perform this pilgrimage, which he was not able to undertake until he had arrived at sixty years of age. He took with him a present of gold cups and embroidered vestments for the pope. Pauli pretends that the gifts were "magnificent," a word which seems hardly justified. He reserved one-tenth of his private fortune for the Church, endowing lamps for the shrines of St. Peter and St. Paul with oil for Easter-tide. He was escorted through France by a guard furnished by Charles the Bald; and, while at Rome, he rebuilt and endowed, it is said, the English school.

An attempt has been made to connect Alfred's love of literature and the arts, together with his religious inclination, with the court of the pope, then Leo IV. This seems to me sheer nonsense. Let any one ask himself how far his own love of literature and art was developed at the age of four or five by his surroundings. We have also been called upon to believe that the external politics of Rome became a stimulus to the child in his future tenacity of resistance to the Danes. What does a child of four understand either of foreign or domestic events? Let us dismiss these speculations. The boy, in accordance with the superstition of the age, was taken to Rome in order to receive blessing, or consecration, or Confirmation at the hands of the pope. With him were taken valuable presents for the pope—a gold crown, gold dishes, urns silver gilt, stoles and robes embroidered with silk and gold. As the son of a king—as the son of a king so faithful, the descendant of a line so faithful—the child was received with honour and distinction.

It was in 853 that Alfred was sent to Rome.

In 855 King Ethelwulf himself arrived at the Holy City, and early in 856 Ethelwulf took the boy away with him. He was then in his seventh year, and, of course, still in the hands of nurses and women. Queen Osburh, his mother, was dead. Ethelwulf, then sixty years of age, who had been fighting, and with success, during the greater part of his life against the Welsh and the northern invaders, naturally desired for the time which still remained to him—rest and peace. He might be assisted in securing both by an alliance with the powerful Emperor Charles the Bald. The latter held his court at Verberie, near Compiegne, where he received Ethelwulf on his return from Rome. At Verberie the West Saxon king found a consort instead of an ally; perhaps some kind of an alliance was agreed upon: the marriage was surely designed and carried out for political reasons on both sides. Else why did Ethelwulf, in his old age, choose a girl of twelve? and why did Charles give his daughter, still a child, to this greybeard? It was surely with a view to establish and to maintain friendship between the two courts that the marriage was allowed; though the events proved that the attempt was useless—no such alliance was accepted on the north side of the English Channel. Ethelwulf was married on October 1, 856, the marriage ceremony being performed by Archbishop Hincmar. The coronation of the young queen was solemnly held. This was not in conformity with the usage of the West Saxons. To this point I will return immediately. Meantime we have been again called upon to believe that Alfred's love of learning and his ideas of true kingcraft were inspired in him, and indelibly stamped upon his mind, by

the short stay of three months in the learned and refined court of Verberie. One asks, with impatience, what the child understood of all the learning that was assembled in that court? which of the scholars talked to him? which of them instructed him? what notice was likely to be taken in that great court of a child in the nursery? what his nurse and the women in the nursery understood of all these learned men? Surely these questions show the absurdity of the pretension, which we may pass over as foolish and futile. It was not thus that the boy was educated; the splendour of Rome, the learning of Verberie, were to him not even a passing show; he was too young to understand anything.

Ethelwulf brought the boy home, together with his young queen. On his arrival he was met by a combination which has been variously described. Pauli calls it a revolt of the son against the father; it has also been called a revolt against the king, on account of the coronation of the young queen. What happened was, apparently, this—

Ethelbald, the eldest surviving son of Ethelwulf, with certain thanes of power, entered into a rebellious conspiracy not to allow the old king to return to his authority. I suppose there is no doubt as to this main fact. Ethelwulf, discovering on his return what had occurred, acquiesced in the decision, and quietly resigned the crown of Wessex to his son, reserving for himself the under-kingdom of Kent, where he spent the rest of his life—less than two years—in the practice of good and pious works.

There is a very strange story in Asser. We cannot choose but believe a story of this impor-

tance, told by a contemporary; but a stranger story cannot be found in history. Let Asser tell it in his own words—

"When Ethelwulf, therefore, was coming from Rome, all that nation, as was fitting, so delighted in the arrival of the old man, that, if he permitted them, they would have expelled his rebellious son Ethelbald, with all his counsellors, out of the kingdom. But he, as we have said, acting with great clemency and prudent counsel, so wished things to be done, that the kingdom might not come into danger; and he placed Judith, daughter of King Charles, whom he had received from her father, by his own side on the regal throne, without any controversy or enmity from his nobles, even to the end of his life, contrary to the perverse custom of that nation. For the nation of the West Saxons do not allow a queen to sit beside the king, nor to be called a queen, but only the king's wife; which stigma, the elders of that land say, arose from a certain obstinate and malevolent queen of the same nation, who did all things so contrary to her lord, and to all the people, that she not only earned for herself exclusion from the royal seat, but also entailed the same stigma upon those who came after her; for, in consequence of that queen, all the nobles of that land swore together that they would never let any king reign over them who should attempt to place a queen on the throne by his side.

"There was in Mercia, in recent times, a certain valiant king, who was feared by all the kings and neighbouring states around. His name was Offa, and it was he who had the great rampart made from sea to sea between Britain and Mercia. His daughter, named Eadburga, was married to Bertric, King of the West Saxons; who immediately, having the king's affections, and the control of almost all the kingdom, began to live tyrannically like her father, and to execrate every man whom Bertric loved, and to do all things hateful to God and man, and to accuse all she could before the king, and so to deprive them insidiously of their life and power; and if she could not obtain the king's consent, she used to

take them off by poison; as is ascertained to have been the case with a certain young man beloved by the king, whom she poisoned, finding that the king would not listen to any accusation against him. It is said, moreover, that King Bertric, unwittingly, tasted of the poison, though the queen intended to give it to the young man only, and so both of them perished.

"Bertric, therefore, being dead, the queen could remain no longer among the West Saxons, but sailed beyond the sea with immense treasures, and went to the court of the great and famous Charles, King of the Franks. As she stood before the throne and offered him money, Charles said to her, 'Choose, Eadburga, between me and my son, who stands here with me.' She replied foolishly, and without deliberation, 'If I am to have my choice, I choose your son, because he is younger than you.' At which Charles smiled and answered, 'If you had chosen me, you would have had my son; but as you have chosen him, you shall not have either of us.'

"However, he gave her a large convent of nuns, in which, having laid aside the secular habit and taken the religious dress, she discharged the office of abbess during a few years; for, as she is said to have lived irrationally in her own country, so she appears to have acted still more so in that foreign country; for, being convicted of having an unlawful intercourse with a man of her own nation, she was expelled from the monastery by King Charles's order, and lived a vicious life of reproach in poverty and misery until her death; so that at last, accompanied by one slave only, as we have heard from many who saw her, she begged her bread daily at Pavia, and so miserably died."

The story was, perhaps, known to the ruling class in Wessex; it was probably in the main lines quite true. Yet surely one cannot believe that the hatred of the people for Eadburga was extended to all the queens in all the Saxon kingdoms.

Let us rather seek the causes of Ethelwulf's

deposition in the condition of the times. The thanes understood that the dangers of the situation were very great. The Norsemen were rapidly advancing; they had overrun the whole of the north country; they were landing with impunity on the coasts of Norfolk and Essex. The Welsh were restless, looking to the Norsemen for help and alliance, dreaming even of sweeping the Saxons back to the sea. Above all things a strong king—a king in the full vigour of manhood, was wanted. We ourselves, over whom a king reigns but does not rule, find it difficult to understand the enormous importance of a strong king. Even now, with all the precautions and hedges which we have put up against the royal prerogative, the mischief which a weak or vicious sovereign would cause the empire might be intolerable. Formerly, as is shown by the history of Ethelred II., of Edward II., of Richard II., of Henry VI., weakness meant ruin. We want no talk of conspiracy or of rebellion. The broad fact remains that the times were full of danger; the outlook was stormy in the extreme. Ethelwulf was old; the battle-axe which he had wielded with so much vigour hung idly from his nerveless wrist; his counsels were no longer warlike and inspiriting; it was necessary that he should give place to a stronger and a younger king. Ethelbald his son was a soldier of proved courage and capacity: let him reign in the place of his father. The situation is so clear, the necessity was so pressing, that all the indignation against the wickedness of rebellion is absolutely wasted. The king, enfeebled by years, devoted to works of piety, asking for nothing more than security and peace, acquiesced with

contentment; he remained a king in name, but his authority and command he had handed over to his son; he recognized the logic of facts; he saw very clearly that the will of the thanes could not be resisted; he acknowledged the reasonableness of their request; and he cheerfully accepted the formal and empty title of King of Kent. One understands very well that he was quite willing to retire. When one has passed the age of sixty, the battle-axe grows heavy, the coat-of-mail is cumbersome, the position of the forefront of battle is no longer a fierce joy, but the probable cause of ignominious death; he was well pleased to hand over the reins of power and the splendour of authority to younger hands, while he himself practised religious works in the security obtained for him by the strong right arm of his son.

Ethelwulf died two years afterwards, leaving behind him a will intended to prevent quarrels among his sons over the succession. He gave his kingdom to be divided between his two eldest sons—could anything be more impolitic than to divide the little realm, the only bulwark against the Danes, into two portions?—and his private property between all his sons and daughters. Again—a clause which shows that the king's care for his own soul was greater than his care for his people—he left a large sum of money to be carried to Rome, a third part to be expended on the Church of St. Peter, a third part on the Church of St. Paul, and a third for the "Universal Apostolic Pontiff." He also directed that throughout his country, "until the day of judgment," one poor man in ten should be supplied with meat, drink, and clothing;" "supposing"—

a very reasonable objection—"the country should still be inhabited by men and cattle and should not be deserted." Here we have a note of the despondency natural to an old king who had been fighting all his life, and now, with death at hand, could see no profit of all his trouble, and little hope for his country.

The Witan paid no attention to the will, except, perhaps, to remark that a king of the West Saxons had no right to dispose of his kingdom after his death. There was no partition, and Ethelbald the son reigned in his stead.

Ethelbald, on the death of his father, actually married the young widow Judith. Did this action mark a tendency to relapse into paganism? It seems unlikely. The people of Wessex had been Christians for nearly two hundred years; the Kings of Wessex had been among the most faithful sons of the Church. Was it simply unholy love which prompted the act? Was it love, or, in some way, policy? One knows not. Asser speaks of the marriage in terms of the greatest indignation. It was contrary to Divine Law, contrary to the custom of heathens; it "drew down infamy upon his head." It is very possible that the same reason was advanced in favour of the marriage which was afterwards used for justifying the marriage of Henry VIII. with his brother's widow. Ethelbald, in other respects, appears to have been a strong king and a good soldier.

He died two years after this marriage. Judith, thereupon, returned to her father's court. As an ancestress of our own king, Edward VII., she may have a line devoted to her adventurous history. Her father, Charles, who seems to have mistrusted her, assigned her to honourable cap-

tivity at Senlis. Here, however, she made the acquaintance of a valiant young knight, Baldwin by name. He was Grand Forester of Flanders, and of noble family, but not of birth which warranted his aspiring to the hand of a king's daughter and widowed queen. However, love prevailed. Judith managed to escape, and fled with him, taking refuge in Lorraine. Then, by the good offices of the Pope, her father became reconciled to what had been done, and made her husband Count of Flanders. He was afterwards known as Bras de Fer—the Iron Arm. Their son, Baldwin II., married Alfred's second daughter. From her was descended Matilda of Flanders, Queen of William the Conqueror. Our royal family is therefore (see p. 21) connected with Alfred by two links at least, the other being Matilda of Scotland, Queen of Henry I.

Ethelbald was succeeded by his next brother, Ethelbert, whom Ethelwulf would have passed over. Ethelbert reigned for five years, "in great tranquillity," says the Chronicle. But in the next sentence we read how the invaders stormed Winchester, so that there were breaks in the tranquillity. In 866 he died, and was buried in Sherborne.

In 866 Ethelred, the fourth son, succeeded. He also reigned five years, dying in 871. He was buried in Wimborne Minster.

In that year Alfred succeeded.

To consider these dates with reference to Alfred's education: when his elder brother, Ethelbald, succeeded, Alfred was seven years of age; at the accession of Ethelbert he was eleven; at the accession of Ethelred he was seventeen. Note also that, in 861, when Alfred was thirteen years

of age, his old friend, and his father's friend, Bishop Swithin (otherwise written Swithun), died.

In 868 Alfred, being then nineteen, took to wife Elswyth, daughter of Ethelred the Mucol (the Big), the Chief of the Gainas, a tribe whose name still survives in that of the town of Gainsborough. We have to fill up a great space in his life, namely, the whole of his boyhood. Perhaps Alfred continued with his father so long as he lived. What became of him then? Did he go with Judith to her unholy marriage with the king? Did Bishop Swithin take charge of him? We have no means of answering the question.

It was, however, the custom in later years—a custom probably observed in the ninth century—for the boy to be taken from women and nurses as soon as he was strong enough to begin the practice of arms and riding, and to place him in the court or in the house of some noble, where he was daily learned in all manner of manly exercises, and taught, above all things, to be a soldier. We may assume that Alfred's education, after he arrived at the age of seven, was chiefly conducted in the exercising and training ground among the sons of the West Saxon nobles. Wherever he was brought up, he heard every day the clash and clang of arms. All through his boyhood his pulse beat high with the excitement of anticipating the time when he, too, would take his place among the foremost; all through his boyhood he heard the reports of the arrival of more Danes in their multitudinous ships, of alternate victories and defeats. He knew not, because no one knew, how the Danes were steadily advancing, wintering one year in Thanet, the next in Sheppey, then in East Anglia, then in the heart of Mercia, closing in

upon the land of Wessex. He knew not that he was destined to free the country, to drive out the invaders, and to make of England what his grandfather almost succeeded in doing—one land with one law, one religion and one speech. These things will be set forth in the pages which follow. And, as he grew to manhood, he was transferred to the court, and learned the arts of war, not only on the parade ground, but also by following the king's armies, and watching the fight, though as yet from afar.

The Wessex court was by this time a court of ceremonial and some splendour. The time had gone by when a Saxon king went about administering justice from a waggon. There were royal vills and palaces, not too splendid, being timber structures hung within with tapestry and arms; but there was what we may call a modern court, with ceremonial, and with officials chosen from the noble families; there was an aristocracy strictly separated from the rest of the nation. Their duty was to furnish a kind of standing army, well armed, in coats of mail, well horsed, but small in number. As soon as the young Alfred had arrived at an age capable of manly exercises and the use of weapons, he joined this army, acquired the manners due to his rank, and was trained in the art of war. To fight was the first duty of every man—to fight, and to die if death were meted out. The first duty of a prince was to lead the army, and to fight in the forefront. To take an interest in literature, learning, and the arts was not thought necessary; to hunt was both a pastime and a necessity when the forests were filled with game of all kinds. The power of making music and singing was not given

to all, but was envied by all. Great was the respect paid to the minstrel; while the lads, princelings or thanelings, kept up their bodily strength by all kinds of rough-and-tumble games.

Alfred was only nineteen when he became a bridegroom; young men then developed fast. No doubt at nineteen he could wield the great battle-axe as deftly and as surely as his brother the king. Later ages have seen among the sons of kings even younger bridegrooms.

We can trace in outline, not in detail, the political events of Alfred's boyhood, but as regards the steps of his education and the place of his education, we cannot do more than surmise, and set down what seems probable.

We must, therefore, be content to know that Alfred, from the very beginning of his public life, showed himself valiant and wise in battle; and in later times, when he was able to think of other things, wiser in council, keener in vision, and more far-reaching in design than any king who had gone before, or, as the event proved, any king who was to come after.

Again, as regards the proposal to consider Alfred's love of literature as due to the deep impression made upon him by the court of Charles the Bald, we must remember, not only that the boy was only six years of age at the time, and was of course kept in the nursery quite apart from the scholars and divines of the court, but also that the court of Wessex itself was by no means illiterate. The monasteries contained scholars and students and monks, who kept alive the lamp of learning; the priests who served the churches had some tincture of learning; many noble ladies, taught in the nunnery,

understood Latin as well as embroidery. The atmosphere of court and country in the ninth century was warlike, but, until the destruction of everything by the Danes, who overthrew and burned more than towers and monasteries—the very desire for knowledge—it was by no means illiterate; while there was a whole body of splendid verse—heroic, religious, warlike, legendary, domestic—which was chanted and recited in the long winter evenings, while king and thanes, queen and ladies, sat round the fire, and waited for the coming of the spring and the return of the Danes. Not the memories of Rome or of Verberie made Alfred love learning, but the poetry of his time, the illuminated books, and the understanding which came to him later, that learning is better for a people than laws, and the wisdom of books is far more useful than statutes of prohibition and ordinances of penalty.

The account of Alfred's marriage, in 868, gives his biographer an opportunity of relating the mysterious story of his lifelong disease. The wedding was of ill omen, though the omens proved false, for the year was one of famine.

"His nuptials were honourably celebrated in Mercia, among innumerable multitudes of people of both sexes; and, after continual feasts both by night and by day, he was immediately seized, in presence of all the people, by a sudden and overwhelming pain, as yet unknown to the physicians; for it was unknown to all who were then present, and even to those who daily see him up to the present time—which, sad to say! is the worst of all, that he should have protracted it so long, from the twentieth to the fortieth year of his life, and even more than that through the space of so many years—from what cause so great a malady arose. For many thought that this was occasioned by the favour and fascination of the people

who surrounded him; others, by some spite of the devil, who is ever jealous of the good; others, from an unusual kind of fever. He had this sort of severe disease from his childhood: but once, Divine Providence so ordered it, that when he was on a visit to Cornwall for the sake of hunting, and had turned out of the road to pray in a certain chapel, in which rests the body of St. Guerir, and now also St. Neot rests there—for King Alfred was always, from his infancy, a frequent visitor of holy places for the sake of prayer and almsgiving—he prostrated himself for private devotion, and, after some time spent therein, he entreated of God's mercy that, in His boundless clemency, He would exchange the torments of the malady which then afflicted him for some other lighter disease; but with this condition, that such disease should not show itself outwardly in his body, lest he should be an object of contempt, and less able to benefit mankind: for he had great dread of leprosy or blindness, or any such complaint, as makes men useless or contemptible when it afflicts them. When he had finished his prayers, he proceeded on his journey, and not long after he felt within him that, by the hand of the Almighty, he was healed, according to his request, of his disorder, and that it was entirely eradicated, although he had first had even this complaint in the flower of his youth, by his devout and pious prayers and supplications to Almighty God. For, if I may be allowed to speak briefly, but in a somewhat preposterous order, of his zealous piety to God, in the flower of his youth, before he entered the marriage state, he wished to strengthen his mind in the observance of God's commandments, for he perceived that he could with difficulty abstain from gratifying his carnal desires; and, because he feared the anger of God if he should do anything contrary to His will, he used often to rise in the morning at the cock-crow, and go to pray in the churches and at the relics of the saints. There he prostrated himself on the ground, and prayed that God, in His mercy, would strengthen his mind still more in His service by some infirmity such as he might bear, but not such as would render him imbecile and contemptible in his worldly duties; and when he had often prayed with

much devotion to this effect, after an interval of some time, Providence vouchsafed to afflict him with the above-named disease, which he bore long and painfully for many years, and even despaired of life, until he entirely got rid of it by his prayers. But, sad to say! it was replaced, as we have said, at his marriage, by another which incessantly tormented him, night and day, from the twentieth to the forty-fourth year of his life. But if ever, by God's mercy, he was relieved from this infirmity for a single day or night, yet the fear and dread of that dreadful malady never left him, but rendered him almost useless, as he thought, for every duty, whether human or divine."

The story is told in the ecclesiastical manner. Those very persons, however, who deride the statement of the biographer and the faith of the sufferer, acknowledge, whenever they attend divine service, the efficacy of prayer and the working of miracles. Day after day—all day long and all night—from cathedral and from church; whenever the family meet for devotion; whenever the mother prays for her children, the wife for her husband, the maiden for her betrothed;—all together pray for miracles. They ask that the laws of nature may be suspended; that the rain may cease; that dry weather may be granted to a saturated land; that the storm that sweeps the ocean may be turned aside from one ship; that the bullets of the enemy may be diverted from one breast. All is miracle for which we pray. The granting of prayer is a miracle. How, then, shall we make objection to Asser because he relates a miracle, or to Alfred because he saw in the change of his sufferings a miraculous answer to his prayer? Let us deny that prayers are answered, and then we may deny that miracles take place.

What was this mysterious disease? It has

been suggested that it was epilepsy. I have no theory to offer. But the conditions, whatever the disease, are clear and simple. It was a malady which was incurable by the medical science of the time. Certainly this condition leaves the door open to a long train of diseases. In addition, it was a disease which subjected the king to continual pain. Yet it was not a disease which destroyed his strength or sapped his energies. In spite of his suffering, he could still swing that terrible battle-axe of his in the front of the battle; he could still spend laborious days with his counsellors; he could read, listen, translate; he could still, and to the very end, take, order, and design steps for the good of his people. Whatever the suffering, he triumphed over it; perhaps he made a ladder of it for climbing higher. He endured in patience, and until it killed him he would not give way to it. What disease is there of all the multitudinous catalogue of the ills which plague humanity which satisfies these conditions: tortures, but not exhausts; is constant in its pain, but does not destroy the strength; leaves the patient but little respite, but does not weaken his will or darken his mind? I know not.

CHAPTER III.

ALFRED'S WARS.

THE whole of the ninth century was one long-continued time of war. The kings fought against each other; nation was divided against nation; they fought the Welsh of Cumberland, Wales, and

Cornwall; they fought the raiders from Norway; they fought the invaders from Denmark. When Alfred succeeded, the land, as he said, was "despoiled by the heathen folk." In the appendix to this chapter I have drawn up a list from the Chronicle of the battles which were fought upon the soil of England during this century.

Briefly, Egbert died in 836, and the supremacy of Wessex practically died with him. Ethelwulf, his son, who succeeded him, was already in middle life, and the father of at least one son arrived at manhood. This son, Athelstan, he made under-king of Kent and of the South Saxons, keeping himself free from Wessex and the British enemies of Cornwall. Of Athelstan we hear, in 851, when with Elcherc the ealdorman, he met and fought the enemy in ships off Sandwich, taking some of their vessels, but not able to prevent them wintering in Thanet—the first of many winterings on English ground.

This is the last we hear of a Saxon fleet until Alfred once more created a naval force. It was in this year that Ethelwulf, with his son Ethelbald, fought the northernmen at Ockley in Surrey, and "there made the greatest slaughter of the heathen that we have heard reported to the present day." Nothing more is said about Athelstan; but five years later we find the third son, Ethelbert, taking his place as under-king of Kent and Sussex.

In 860 Ethelbald died, after a short reign of five years, and was succeeded by his brother Ethelbert. In his reign the heathen landed on the coast of Hampshire—probably at Southampton—and stormed Winchester, but were defeated and put to flight by the men of Hampshire.

In 865 the Danes made peace with the Kentish men from their winter quarters in Thanet, taking money in return for the promise of peace. They broke their pledge, however, and overran Kent, ravaging the whole country.

In 866 Ethelbert died, and was succeeded by his fourth brother, Ethelred. In that year another great army of Danes came over and made their winter quarters in East Anglia, where the people provided them with horses, and bought peace of them at a price.

In 867 they left East Anglia, and went into Northumbria; at York, where they were settled in the autumn for their winter quarters, the Northumbrians attacked them, broke into the town, and killed a great many, but were themselves driven out with the loss of both their kings. They then, we hear, "made peace," *i.e.* bought peace, "with the army." Observe that we have here the third example of a weakness which was a direct encouragement to the enemy; the people bought peace in Kent, bought peace in East Anglia, bought peace in Northumbria. What kind of respect would the Danes hold towards a people which bought peace instead of winning peace at the sword-point? Therefore we are in no way surprised when we find them going into Mercia the following year, and taking up their winter quarters at Nottingham. Then the King of Mercia, Burhred, who was married to Ethelwulf's daughter, asked the assistance of King Ethelred, his brother-in-law. Observe that the assistance is no longer claimed as it would have been if the supremacy of Wessex had been maintained. Wessex is now only another and a sister kingdom. Ethelred marched to his brother-in-

law's help, however, accompanied by Alfred, who was now in his nineteenth year. They found the Danes in a fortified camp at Nottingham. There was no great battle; the men of Wessex, finding that the enemy would not come out to fight, retired, and the Mercians "made peace," *i.e.* bought peace—the fourth nation which thus sold their honour and betrayed their liberties.

The weak points in the defence were (see Oman on *Alfred as Warrior*, Bowker's "Alfred," p. 119), first, the want of a central organization for defence. The necessity for such an organization had probably forced itself upon the recognition of the leaders; this may explain the apparent ease with which Wessex obtained the supremacy under Egbert. That supremacy broke down on account of the difficulty of moving troops from one place to another where there were no roads, or only tracks through forests, and the waterways of rivers, which were useless without boats. Yet we find Burhred of Mercia calling in the aid of Ethelred. Against this difficulty on the part of the defenders set the superior mobility of the Danes: they had their light boats, which could float on all the rivers, they requisitioned all the horses; they had the fleet at their backs. While the Saxons were slowly moving towards them they could embark and make for another part of the country.

There was, next, the want of a regular army. There were two classes of fighting men among the Saxons—the thanes, who held the land, and were bound to join the host on the summons of the king, and the ceorls, or peasants. The former class were well armed, and carried coats-of-mail, helmets, and shields; the latter went into

battle armed with nothing more than a pike. The army was a kind of militia, called a *fyrd*. It was called out by consent of the Witenagemot; it served, as a rule, no more than two months, when the men returned to their homes. Before success could be hoped, it was absolutely necessary that the king should be able to call out his army without consulting the Witan, and that this army should assume a character of greater permanence.

It was also necessary that the men should be fully equipped if they were to act with success against an enemy whose first care was the acquisition of good weapons and good armour. In order to effect this it was necessary to enlarge the class of thanes, who would supply their own arms, and to provide better weapons for the ceorls.

Another point of weakness was the want of fortified places. There appear to have been none at all. The Saxons, as we have seen, disliked towns and scorned walls. Therefore the old Roman walls had been allowed to fall into decay; even at York, Chester, London, Winchester, and Canterbury, where there were ancient walls, the gates had been torn away from their hinges, and the walls themselves were broken down. Now, the possession of fortified places would have given the defenders an enormous advantage; on the other hand, the Danes understood the value of a fortified position. They chose for their camps places protected, for choice, by a river or the bend of a river, where their ships could lie moored, and for the parts unprotected they dug a ditch and then put up a stockade. It seems strange that the Saxons should have been so long in learning the lesson of the value of fortifications, but

the habits of a whole people are not easily changed. They had first to learn that walls, stockades, and ditches were invaluable in war; next, to learn how to construct them; and lastly, how to defend them.

It seems equally strange that they did not understand the value of a fleet. We have seen Athelstan, the eldest son, fighting the Danes with ships. It is the first appearance of a fleet and the last, until Alfred restored the English navy. One would like to know more about Athelstan's fleet. Since Alfred had at first to rely upon Frisian sailors, it seems probable that Athelstan also fell back on these people. After the engagement the Danes, who wintered in Thanet, overran and ravaged the land of Kent; Athelstan therefore was unable to pay his foreign sailors, and so they went home again with their ships.

After the failure of their attempts on Nottingham, Ethelred and Alfred returned home and the *fyrd* disbanded, we may understand with sinking hearts, for now, indeed, nothing was left of England but only their own land of Wessex; and the war would be renewed, and would demand greater efforts still in the following spring.

In the spring of the year 871 the Danes began their invasion of Wessex with a large army, containing not only their own men, but a great number of Vikings—the men of Norway. They came in their ships; they swept up the Thames, having on either bank troops mounted and on foot. They met with no opposition until they came to Reading, where they halted and formed a camp, protected by the Kennet and the Thames on two sides, and on the third side of the triangular camp by a rampart with a stockade and a ditch. Then

the Danish eorls went out to plunder. Some of them were met by Alderman Ethelwulf with the *fyrd* of Berkshire, and driven off the field with the loss of one of their eorls. Then Ethelred and Alfred arrived with reinforcements, and then followed fighting in which the brave Alderman was killed, and the Saxons had to retire.

Asser's account is as follows:—

"In the year of our Lord's Incarnation 871, which was the twenty-third of King Alfred's life, the pagan army, of hateful memory, left the East Angles, and entering the kingdom of West Saxons, came to the royal city called Reading, situated on the south bank of the Thames, in the district called Berkshire; and there, on the third day of their arrival, their earls, with great part of the army, scoured the country for plunder, while the others made a rampart between the rivers Thames and Kennet on the right side of the same royal city. They were encountered by Ethelwulf, Earl of Berkshire, with his men, at a place called Englefield; both sides fought bravely, and made long resistance. At length one of the pagan earls was slain, and the greater part of the army destroyed; upon which the rest saved themselves by flight, and the Christians gained the victory.

"Four days afterwards, Ethelred, King of the West Saxons, and his brother Alfred united their forces and marched to Reading, where, on their arrival, they cut to pieces the pagans whom they found outside the fortifications. But the pagans, nevertheless, sallied out from the gates, and a long and fierce engagement ensued. At last, grief to say, the Christians fled, the pagans obtained the victory, and the aforesaid Earl Ethelwulf was among the slain."

Meantime the Danes, as at Nottingham, kept within their stockade, and refused to come out. Ethelred and Alfred retired; then the Danes, thinking that they had fled, came out of their camp and marched into Wessex, intending to make

an end. A few days later they came up with the Saxon host at Ashdown. The battle of Ashdown is one of the most important events in the history of the Danish invasion. The enemy had overrun and subdued the whole of the country except Wessex; they were flushed with victory; they were contemptuous of the Saxons; they were accustomed to sell peace for money, and to break their pledges when they chose. Now, for the first time, they were to meet with a serious repulse, and an enemy more determined than those of Mercia and Northumbria.

First, let me quote the words of the Chronicle:—

"Then Ethelwulf, the Ealdorman, met them at Englefield, and there fought against them, and got the victory; and there one of them, whose name was Sidrac, was slain. About three days after this, King Ethelred and Alfred his brother led a large force to Reading, and fought against the army, and there was great slaughter made on either hand. And Ethelwulf the Ealdorman was slain, and the Danish men had possession of the place of carnage. And about four days after this, King Ethelred and Alfred his brother fought against the whole army at Ashdown; and they were in two bodies, in the one were Bagsac and Halfdene the heathen kings, and in the other were the earls. And then King Ethelred fought against the division under the kings, and there King Bagsac was slain; and Alfred his brother against the division under the earls, and there Earl Sidrac the elder was slain, Earl Sidrac the younger, and Earl Osbern, and Earl Frene, and Earl Harold; and both divisions of the army were put to flight, and many thousands slain: and they continued fighting until night."

Asser's account gives more detail:—

"Roused by this calamity, the Christians, in shame and indignation, within four days assembled all their

forces, and again encountered the pagan army at a place called Ashdune, which means the "Hill of the Ash." The pagans had divided themselves into two bodies, and began to prepare defences, for they had two kings and many earls, so they gave the middle part of the army to the two kings, and the other part to all the earls; which the Christians perceiving, divided their army also into two troops, and also began to construct defences. But Alfred, as we have been told by those who were present, and would not tell an untruth, marched up promptly with his men to give them battle; for King Ethelred remained a long time in his tent in prayer, hearing the mass, and said that he would not leave it till the priest had done, or abandon the Divine protection for that of men. And he did so, too, which afterwards availed him much with the Almighty, as we shall declare more fully in the sequel.

"Now, the Christians had determined that King Ethelred, with his men, should attack the two pagan kings, but that his brother Alfred, with his troops, should take the chance of war against the two earls. Things being so arranged, the king remained a long time in prayer, and the pagans came up rapidly to fight. Then Alfred, though possessing a subordinate authority, could no longer support the troops of the enemy, unless he retreated or charged upon them without waiting for his brother. At length he bravely led his troops against the hostile army, as they had before arranged, but without awaiting his brother's arrival; for he relied on the Divine counsels, and forming his men into a dense phalanx, marched on at once to meet the foe.

"But here I must inform those who are ignorant of the fact, that the field of battle was not equally advantageous to both parties. The pagans occupied the higher ground, and the Christians came up from below. There was also a single thorn-tree of stunted growth, but we have ourselves never seen it. Around this tree the opposing armies came together with loud shouts from all sides, the one party to pursue their wicked course, the other to fight for their lives, their dearest ties, and their country. And when both armies had fought long and bravely, at last the pagans by the Divine judgment were no longer

able to bear the attacks of the Christians, and, having lost great part of their army, took to a disgraceful flight. One of their two kings and five earls were there slain, together with many thousand pagans, who fell on all sides, covering with their bodies the whole plain of Ashdune.

"There fell in that battle King Bagsac, Earl of Sidrac the elder, and Earl Sidrac the younger, Earl Osbern, Earl Frene, and Earl Harold; and the whole pagan army pursued its flight, not only until night, but until the next day, even until they reached the stronghold from which they had sallied. The Christians followed, slaying all they could reach, until it became dark."

We must remember that this account is written from the English side. We may quite readily accept his statement as to the slaughter and the flight of the Danes; but they fled to their fortified camp, and they were not demoralized by their flight or disheartened by their losses. Death on the field was natural—the common lot—much more desirable than death by old age in a bed; and to run away was by no means a disgrace. In a few days—the Chronicle says a fortnight—the Danes again took the field. It has been proposed as an explanation of what followed that while Ethelred and Alfred were still on the west of Reading, the Danes slipped out and struck south, threatening the capital, by way of Basing, which lay then, as it lies now, on the road between Reading and Winchester. This movement is, of course, quite possible, and perhaps the tactics of the Danes were thus exactly what they would be now; there are strategic movements and combinations common to all ages, and in every stage of the art of war. On learning the southward march of the enemy, Ethelred and Alfred marched after them, and gave them battle near Basing. An examination of the lie of the ground here would per-

haps determine the site of the battle. At Basing the Saxons were defeated, yet it was little more than a reverse. After a rest of two months, the Saxons again gave battle to the enemy, this time at a place called Meretun, which has been identified with a hamlet called Martin, on the Roman Road between Winchester and Marlborough; if so, it shows that the Danes had abandoned their project (if they ever entertained it) of an attack upon Winchester, and were marching west. At "Meretun," therefore, the next great battle took place. The Danes fought in two divisions; the Saxons put "both to flight, and during a great part of the day were victorious" (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle); "but the Danes had possession of the place of carnage, and there Bishop Heahmund was slain and many good men. And after this there came a great army in the summer to Reading. And after this, at Easter, King Ethelred died; and he reigned five years, and his body lies in Wimborne Minster." "Ethelred," says Asser, "had governed bravely, honourably, and with good report for five years, through much tribulation." His epitaph in Wimborne recorded that he met his death *per manus paganorum*. Why he was not buried with his own people at Sherborne is not apparent, for the place can hardly have been in the hands of the enemy.

In this manner Alfred succeeded to the uneasy crown of Wessex. "In this year," the Chronicle informs us, "nine general battles were fought against the army in the kingdom south of the Thames; besides which Alfred, the king's brother, and single aldermen and king's thanes, often made incursions on them, which are not counted; and within the year nine earls and one king"—Bagsac,

the Dane—"were slain. And that year the West Saxons made peace with the army." The last clause is significant and melancholy.

Alfred succeeded; it was his plain duty, unless he would leave his people, as some of the Saxon princes had done, to their fate, while he retired to Rome. That he understood the nature of the work that lay before him is shown by his own words: "Covetousness and the possession of earthly power I did not like well, nor strongly desired at all this earthly kingdom, but felt it to be the work I was commanded to do." In a month after his brother's death Alfred was again in the field with a small force. It was at Wilton that he once more tried his fortune against the enemy. The force was composed, apparently, of the Wiltshire *fyrd*.

"When he had reigned one month, almost against his will, for he did not think he could alone sustain the multitude and ferocity of the pagans, though even during his brothers' lives he had borne the woes of many, he fought a battle with a few men, and on very unequal terms, against all the army of the pagans, at a hill called Wilton, on the south bank of the river Wily, from which river the whole of that district is named, and, after a long and fierce engagement, the pagans, seeing the danger they were in, and no longer able to bear the attack of their enemies, turned their backs and fled. But, oh, shame to say, they deceived their too audacious pursuers, and again rallying, gained the victory. Let no one be surprised that the Christians had but a small number of men, for the Saxons had been worn out by eight battles in one year against the pagans, of whom they had slain one king, nine dukes, and innumerable troops of soldiers, besides endless skirmishes, both by night and by day, in which the oft-named Alfred and all his chieftains, with their men, and several of his ministers, were engaged without rest or cessation against the pagans. How many thousand

pagans fell in those numberless skirmishes God alone knows, over and above those who were slain in the eight battles above-mentioned. In the same year the Saxons made peace with the pagans, on condition that they should take their departure, and they did so."

The Danes consented to be paid for peace. Alfred paid them in order to gain time; it was all he could do. The Danes, for a time, kept their word; they retired from Reading upon London, which they made their winter quarters. London, one must point out, was at this time considered to belong to Mercia; the Danes were therefore outside Alfred's boundaries.

It may very well be that the Danes became more or less disheartened by the obstinacy of the resistance they encountered. But it is a mistake to suppose that the resistance was greater in Wessex than in other parts. Everywhere it was the same experience—the opposition of gallant leaders and brave men against superior numbers better armed; the beating down of resistance with enormous losses on both sides; the continual arrival of reinforcements from over the sea; an inglorious peace, bought and paid for; after a while a broken treaty and renewed war. This is the history of the Danes in Northumbria and in Mercia, as well as in Wessex. Only in Wessex the end was different, because the leaders were different. The description given by Henry of Huntingdon a long time afterwards is both true and graphic.

"If the Danes were sometimes defeated, victory was of no avail, inasmuch as a descent was made in some other quarter by a large fleet and a more numerous force. It was wonderful how, when the English kings were hastening to encounter them in the eastern districts, before they

could fall in with the enemy's band, a hurried messenger would arrive and say, 'Sire, king, whither are you marching? The heathen have disembarked from a countless fleet on the southern coast, and are ravaging the towns and villages, carrying fire and slaughter into every quarter.' The same day another messenger would come running and say, 'Sire, king, whither are you retreating? A formidable army has landed in the west of England, and if you do not quickly turn your face toward them, they will think you are fleeing, and follow in your rear with fire and sword.' Again the same day, or on the morrow, another messenger would arrive, saying, 'What place, O noble chief, are you making for? The Danes have made a descent in the north; already they have burnt your mansions, even now they are sweeping away your goods; they are tossing your young children on the points of their spears; wives are forcibly dishonoured, others they have carried off with them.' Bewildered by such various tidings of bitter woe, both kings and people lost their vigour both of mind and body, and were utterly prostrated, so that even when they defeated the enemy, victory was not attended with its wonted triumphs, and supplied no confidence of safety for the future."

It is not the purpose of this book to follow these Danish wars in other parts of the kingdom. Alfred obtained a respite; the enemy went north into Northumbria, into Lincolnshire, into Mercia; everywhere they were victorious. As for the King of Mercia, he deserted his country and his people, and went to Rome, where he died. His widow, Alfred's sister, remained, and did for the distracted country what a woman could.

After three years' respite we hear of Alfred beginning the war again; in 875 we find him taking up his brother Athelstan's work, and forming the nucleus of a fleet. Alfred is generally credited with the creation of a navy. It is, however, quite certain that Athelstan, as we have

seen, preceded him in recognizing the necessity of meeting the Danes on the sea, and that Alfred learned this lesson from his elder brother. If he could control the sea; if he could watch the estuaries, the rivers, and the landing-places; he would be able effectually to keep off the enemy. He could not hope to do this except by slow degrees, but he began in 875, with a small fleet, intercepting and fighting a Danish squadron of seven ships, one of which he took, putting the rest to flight.

In the following year the Danes attacked Wessex from the other side, the west, marching upon Wareham. Perhaps they designed to form an alliance with the Cornishmen; perhaps they intended to make a diversion, and to strike terror into a part of the country previously secure; perhaps they were allured by the hope of plunder. My own theory is that the time had gone by when they wanted simply to plunder, to harry, to burn, to destroy; nor is it sufficient to consider that there was at Wareham a rich and flourishing nunnery; the time for revenge upon the Christians for the persecution by Charlemagne had also gone by. The Danes, I am persuaded, were now seriously intent upon the much greater and more important business of completing the conquest of England by that of Wessex; the rest of the country they already occupied; Wessex as yet held out. Surely it is unintelligible that with such a prize as this almost within their grasp they should be turned aside by the prospect of plundering a nunnery. The condition of the Saxons and the strength of the enemy are shown by the sequel. Alfred could not turn them out, yet they could not overrun the country as they

had overrun Mercia: "The king made peace with the army," the Chronicle tells us. "They delivered to the king hostages from among the most distinguished men of the army, and they swore oaths to him on the holy ring, which they would never before do to any nation, that they would speedily depart from the kingdom. Notwithstanding this, that part of the army which was horsed stole away by night from the fortress"—*i.e.* the fortified camp at Wareham—"to Exeter."

The things that follow show the perfidy, the courage, the audacity of an enemy who fought not according to rules, but in order to win, taking every advantage. Part of the Danish force was in Exeter, part in their camp at Wareham, when winter came on, and military operations had to cease. The country in winter being impossible for the march of armies, for camping out, for the conveyance of munitions and provisions, either by waggons or by pack-horses, both sides sat down and waited. There were, however, places where operations could be carried on in winter; these places, as we shall see, had not escaped the notice of the Danes, whose leaders seem to have had a fine eye for situation.

The Danes at Wareham sent for reinforcements. It was, however, a regular thing for one expedition, at least, to be fitted out in Denmark for the conquest of England; the only uncertainty was the place of landing. This year they resolved on sending their reinforcements to Wareham. Their landing-place was probably Poole or Swanage. Between Swanage and Weymouth there runs a lofty wall of cliffs, against which many tall ships have been driven and wrecked. In the midst of the cliffs is the small and safe cove of Lulworth, of

which the Danes probably knew nothing. Their fleet of 120 ships, all manned with warriors, sailed down the Channel in safety—one believes that it was in the spring or early summer—almost as far as their destination. Then arose a mighty storm; the ships were driven before the wind past Poole Harbour, past Swanage Bay, along and under the dreadful cliffs. One by one the frail light craft became unmanageable, and were driven against these walls, where they broke up and were scattered. The whole of this great fleet, with its army of many thousands was wrecked, and the men were drowned. No greater misfortune had ever happened to the Danes in their many invasions. The force at Wareham, finding themselves cut off from help and from provisions, sallied forth, evaded Alfred, and reached Exeter in safety.

This city was remarkable as being perhaps alone among the cities of England, amicably occupied by Welsh and Saxons alike. It has been urged that the Danes in going there did not break their pledge to depart out of Alfred's realm, because Exeter was beyond his boundaries. That is not so. The frontier of Wessex was extended as far as the river Tamar, and the supremacy of Wessex covered the whole of Cornwall (Freeman, i. p. 42). Exeter was Alfred's city. However, the Danes got there, and as they did everywhere, they strengthened their camp with ditches and a stockade. Here they were safe, except for an important want, that of provisions. Alfred could not take their stronghold, but he could, and did, blockade them and cut off the supplies. It is easy to understand that they were in a hostile country. The people would bring in nothing. The Danes depended upon the success of plundering, sallies,

and forays, and they were met everywhere by Alfred. They did not surrender, but they entered into negotiations, gave hostages and took oaths; and so they retired, leaving Wessex free from their presence, and went north into Mercia, their own by right of conquest. Then, secure for the time, the Wessex fyrd was disbanded, and returned every man to his own place.

Winter fell upon the country. This meant, to repeat, the cutting off of communications, the isolation of villages, the impossibility of doing anything. But the Danes had no such isolation to face; their forces were in winter quarters, but they were always ready to go anywhere or to do anything that was demanded of them.

The town of Chippenham (the "Place of the Market") was, as its name imports, a trading centre of the Saxons; it was also a royal residence. It stands on the river Avon, which, to the Danes, was as good as a modern highroad. It is surrounded by chalk hills and downs, which, even in winter, were possible for the movements of troops. Contrary to all custom and precedent, the Danes broke up their winter quarters, and, moving west, protected from observation by the cold and dark winter days, they suddenly appeared before Chippenham, seized it, and made it their headquarters. Then, as the historian says, "They spread over the country like locusts, and, there being no one able to resist them, they took possession of it for themselves."

Wessex was taken by storm and by surprise. Concerning the details of this terrible winter we have few. It was a time of ravaged farms, burned villages, churches and monasteries destroyed, towns sacked. "Many of the people," the Anglo-

Saxon Chronicle says, "were driven across the seas; the remainder, the greater part, were subdued and forced to obey." Those who fled across the sea were the thanes and the better sort, with those of the priests and monks who escaped the general massacre. No such visitation is recorded in English history, unless, perhaps, William the Conqueror's ruthless lesson in the north; nor can we realize the condition of the country and the people after this wave of savage conquest had passed over it. Nor, again, can we so much as surmise what Alfred was doing to stem the torrent. Whatever he attempted was, it is certain, a failure. He probably tried to raise the fyrd, but could not summon the men on account of the frequent bands of the enemy; nor could the men come to him, because many of them were murdered, and the rest received no summons, and the only ways that were tolerable were held by the enemy. Black as night was the prospect. Wessex had fallen, as Mercia, Anglia, Northumbria had fallen. The conquest of the country seemed complete; to the Danes themselves it seemed complete. The king had disappeared; there was no longer any army in the field. From the Tamar to Severn, from the Thames to the seaboard, there was no longer any resistance; there was no longer any opposition possible.

The king had disappeared. No doubt he was across the sea, making his way to Rome, there to join his brother-in-law, Burhred of Mercia. The Danes had nothing more to do but to divide the lands, as they had already done in other parts of England, and to settle down.

One cannot choose but inquire what would have been the consequences to the country had

the Danish conquest been actually complete. Of course, such speculations are quite futile. The first result would have been the entire destruction of the Saxon religion, learning, arts, and civilization. The Danes had much in common with their kin as regards institutions, but they were many centuries behind them in all other respects. As with the Saxons, the conversion to Christianity, absolutely necessary before any further advance could be made, would have to be done all over again, with the re-introduction of learning, the teaching of the arts, and the renewal of communication with other nations. On the other hand, the Danes were a quick-witted race; they had not exterminated the Saxons—they would have learned from them. Would they have formed a single homogeneous, powerful nation? Would they have developed and advanced on lines similar to those which have made England great and the mother of nations?

Alfred had not fled across the seas; he was in a fastness of his own, waiting, watching, and designing. Alone among his people, he had not lost hope. If we consider the overwhelming odds against him—the whole country in the hand of the enemy, his own people harried, scattered, murdered, terror-stricken, isolated—that he still retained hope is most wonderful. I am not one of those who regard Alfred as a saint; he was purely human, of this world, but he was a man of profound faith, who lived habitually, as far as he could, up to the standard of his faith, and I cannot but acknowledge that he was supported, comforted, sustained by his religious faith. We need not, unless we choose, believe all the stories that are told about his faith, but the fact remains

that God and his Saviour, the saints, the angels, the Church, were always living with him and in him, directing him and ruling his thoughts.

Some of the stories are childish, as that about the cakes; some are clearly mythical, as of the visit to the Danish camp in the disguise of a minstrel. One, however, stands out clear and distinct. It appears to me to have been a waking dream, the vision of one whose mind, sorely tried, was open to visions and to dreams. It is a story from the lips of St. Cuthbert, and has been put into the following shape by Freeman:—

"Now, it came to pass on a day that all Alfred's folk were gone out to fish, save only Alfred himself, and his wife, and one servant whom he loved. And there came a pilgrim to the king, and begged for food, and the king said to his servant—

"'What food have we in the house?'

"And his servant answered, 'My lord, we have in the house but one loaf, and a little wine.'

"Then the king gave thanks to God, and said, 'Give half of the loaf and half of the wine to this poor pilgrim.'

"So the servant did as his lord commanded him, and gave to the pilgrim half of the loaf and half of the wine, and the pilgrim gave great thanks to the king. And when the servant returned, he found the loaf whole, and the wine as much as there had been aforetime. And he greatly wondered; and he wondered, also, how the pilgrim had come into the isle, for that no man could come there save by water, and the pilgrim had no boat.

"And the king greatly wondered also. And at the ninth hour came back the folk who had gone to fish. And they had their boats full of fish, and they said—

"'Lo, we have caught this day more fish than in all the three years we have tarried in this island.'

"And the king was glad, and he and his folk were merry, yet he pondered much on that which had come to

pass. And when night came, the king went to bed with Ealhswytha, his wife. And the lady slept, but the king lay awake and thought of all that had come to pass by day. And presently he saw a great light, like the brightness of the sun, and he saw an old man with black hair, clothed in priest's garments, and with a mitre on his head, and holding in his right hand a book of the gospels, adorned with gold and gems. And the old man blessed the king, and the king said unto him, 'Who art thou?'

"And he answered, 'Alfred, my son, rejoice; for I am he to whom thou didst this day give thine alms, and I am called Cuthbert, the soldier of Christ. Now, be strong and very courageous, and be of joyful heart, and hearken diligently to the things which I say unto thee; for henceforth I will be thy shield and thy friend, and I will watch over thee and over thy sons after thee. And now I will tell thee what thou must do. Rise up early in the morning, and blow thine horn thrice, that thy enemies may hear it and fear, and by the ninth hour thou shalt have around thee five hundred men harnessed for the battle. And this shall be a sign unto thee that thou mayest believe. And after seven days thou shalt have of God's gift and my help all the folk of this land gathered unto thee upon the mount that is called Assandun (Ethandune). And thus shalt thou fight against thine enemies, and doubt not that thou shalt overcome them. Be thou, therefore, glad of heart, and be strong and very courageous, and fear not, for God hath given thine enemies into thine hand. And He hath given thee also this land, and the kingdom of thy fathers, to thee and to thy sons' sons after thee. Be thou faithful to me and to my folk, because unto thee is given all the land of Albion. Be thou righteous, because thou art chosen to be the King of all Britain. So may God be merciful unto thee, and I will be thy friend, and none of thine enemies shall be able to overcome thee.'

"Then was King Alfred glad at heart, and he was strong and very courageous, for that he knew that he would overcome his enemies by the help of God and St. Cuthbert his patron. So in the morning he arose, and sailed to the land, and blew his horn three times, and

when his friends heard it they were glad, and when his enemies heard it they feared. And by the ninth hour, according to the word of the Lord, there were gathered unto him five hundred men of the bravest and dearest of his friends. And he spake unto them, and told them all that God had said unto him by the mouth of His servant Cuthbert; and he told them that, by the gift of God and the help of St. Cuthbert, they would overcome their enemies and win back their own land. And he bade them, as St. Cuthbert had taught him, to fear God always, and to be always righteous towards all men. And he bade his son Edward, who was by him, to be faithful to God and St. Cuthbert, and so he should always have the victory over his enemies. So they went forth to battle, and smote their enemies and overcame them, and King Alfred took the kingdom of all Britain, and he ruled well and wisely over the just and the unjust for the rest of his days."

In the midst of the great marsh of Sedgemore, now intersected by drains and ditches, there rises, as one drives from Bridgwater to Langport, a low but well-defined hill out of the flat. This hill is Athelney; and here, amidst the swamps, impenetrable save to the country folk who knew the way, and protected from the enemy by its agues and fevers, Alfred found a place of refuge for himself, his queen, his children, and a small following. The Chronicle says that he constructed a fortress there. It may very well be that he had learned the importance of a stockade from the Danes. He could depend upon no other help than that of the men of Somerset, a folk of the forest and the moor, a fisher folk, a rough wild people, who were not daunted by the superior numbers of the enemy, nor by the terror of their name, nor by their victorious invasion of the whole county.

THE ISLE OF ATHELNEY.

Alfred, however, remained in Athelney until six weeks after Easter, which brings us to the month of May or June. He was not wholly inactive; he was continually leading sallies against the enemy, surprising bodies of them, cutting them off, and coming upon them unexpectedly. It is also reasonable to suppose that he was sending out messengers to call only the fyrd, wherever there was a chance of finding men still living and ready to obey the summons. The renewal of hostilities was not altogether the work of the king; had he not been backed by the tenacity, the obstinacy of a people who knew not when they were beaten, he would have effected nothing. The leader of men, even if he be a Napoleon or a Hannibal, is dependent on the courage of his men. Then there came good news to Athelney. A Danish fleet of twenty-three ships had come from South Wales, where they had wintered, to the coast of Devonshire, and on landing the enemy had been met and totally defeated, with the loss of more than eight hundred men, the death of the leader, and the capture of the banner called the "Raven."

"In the same year the brother of Hingwar and Halfdene, with twenty-three ships, after much slaughter of the Christians, came from the country of Demetia, where he had wintered, and sailed to Devon, where, with twelve hundred others, he met with a miserable death, being slain while committing his misdeeds, by the king's servant, before the Castle of Cynuit (Kynwith), into which many of the king's servants, with their followers, had fled for safety. The pagans, seeing that the castle was altogether unprepared and unfortified, except that it had walls in our fashion, determined not to assault it, because it was impregnable and secure on all sides, except the eastern, as we ourselves have seen, but they began to

blockade it, thinking that those who were inside would soon surrender either from famine or want of water, for the castle had no spring near it. But the result did not fall out as they expected; for the Christians, before they began to suffer from want, inspired by Heaven, judging it much better to gain victory or death, attacked the pagans suddenly in the morning, and from the first cut them down in great numbers, slaying also their king, so that few escaped to their ships; and there they gained a very large booty, and amongst other things the standard called 'Raven;' for they say that the three sisters of Hingwar and Hubba, daughters of Lodobroch, wove that flag and got it ready in one day. They say, moreover, that in every battle, wherever the flag went before them, if they were to gain the victory a live crow would appear flying on the middle of the flag; but if they were doomed to be defeated it would hang down motionless, and this was often proved to be so."

The loss of this magic banner was, no doubt, a grievous discouragement to the Danes. I have no doubt that by this loss and by the reverses—the unexpected reverses—which followed, they were prepared for the strange and sudden surrender which followed.

Alfred met his newly raised army near Stourton, in Wiltshire. A modern tower, called Alfred's Tower, has been built to commemorate the awakening of the people. They came with renewed hope and with renewed courage to be led once more by the young king, in whom neither hope nor courage had ever faltered, Alfred made no stay at Stourton. The day after the meeting he led his forces to a place called Iglea (Iley), perhaps near Melksham, perhaps Leigh, now Westbury, Wilts, and on the following day to Ethandune, near Eddington, now a village on the east of Westbury. Here may be seen at the present

day a camp covering twenty-three acres of ground called Bratton Castle, formed in part by a double rampart in some places thirty-six feet high. This place is said to have been the entrenchment to which the Danes retreated after the battle of Ethandune. The battle continued during the whole day, ending with the flight of the Danes and the slaughter of a great number. All the Danes who did not take refuge in this fort were killed, and their cattle and everything with them were seized by the Saxons. The Danes had been often beaten in battle; victory or defeat was uncertain, it was the end they looked to, and if they could renew their struggle they cared little for a repulse. But on this occasion their plight was desperate, for Alfred invested the camp. They seem to have been unable to sally out by day, or, after their favourite device, to creep out by night and escape. Was it the loss of the "Raven" which weighed down their hearts? I think so, and the comparison of Alfred's God with their own. They had no provisions. After a fortnight they sued for peace.

"When he had been there fourteen days, the pagans, driven by famine, cold, fear, and last of all by despair, asked for peace, on the condition that they should give the king as many hostages as he pleased, but should receive none of him in return, in which form they had never before made a treaty with any one. The king, hearing that, took pity upon them, and received such hostages as he chose; after which the pagans swore, moreover, that they would immediately leave the kingdom; and their king, Guthrun, promised to embrace Christianity, and receive Baptism at King Alfred's hands. All of which articles he and his son fulfilled as they had promised. For after seven weeks Guthrun, king of the pagans, with thirty men chosen from the army, came to Alfred at a

place called Aller, near Athelney, and there King Alfred, receiving him as his son by adoption, raised him up from the holy laver of Baptism on the eighth day, at a royal villa named Wedmore, where the holy chrism was poured upon him. After his Baptism he remained twelve nights with the king, who, with all his nobles, gave him many fine houses."

It is, therefore, certain that Alfred was complete master of the situation. Had he chosen, he might have massacred the whole army; it was better statesmanship to let them go with such pledges as they would give, and, not trusting to their promises, to bind them to the victors by the tie of conversion and Baptism. Guthrun was baptized: the rite was the beginning of a new order.

Then was made the Treaty of Wedmore, thus presented by Stubbs—

"This is the peace that King Alfred and King Guthrun, and the wise men of all the English nation, and all the people that are in East Anglia (England), have all ordained and with oaths confirmed, for themselves and for their descendants, as well for born as for unborn, who reck of God's mercy or of ours.

"Concerning our land boundaries; up on the Thames, and then up on the Lea, and along the Lea unto its source, then right to Bedford, then up on the Ouse and Watling Street. . . .

"There is this: If a man be slain, we estimate all equally dear, English and Danish, at eight half-marks of pure gold; except the ceorl who resides on rent (gafol) land and their freedmen (liesings); they also are equally dear, either at two hundred shillings. . . .

"And if a king's thegn be accused of manslaying, if he dare to clear himself, let him do that with twelve king's thegns. If any one accuse that man who is of less degree than the king's thegn, let him clear himself with eleven of his equals, and with one king's thegn. And so in every suit which may be for more than four mancuses. And

if he dare not, let him pay for it threefold, as it may be valued.

"And that every man know his warrantor for men, and for horses, and for oxen. . . .

"And we all ordained on that day that the oaths were sworn, that neither bond nor free might go to the host without leave, no more than any of them to us. But if it happens that from necessity any of them will have traffic with us or we with them, with cattle and with goods, that is to be allowed on this wise: the hostages be given in pledge of peace, and as evidence whereby it may be known that the party has a clean back."

This was not a final settlement between Dane and Saxon, but it was a temporary measure of relief, and for a time at least, the land had peace. The "army" went to Cirencester, where they remained a whole year, after which they went on to East Anglia, where they began to parcel out the land as they had done already in Northumbria. Observe that the more the Danes settled down, even though reinforcements arrived every year, the more unwilling they became to carry on the old predatory warfare; in other words, the stronger they became in their settlements, the better it was for parts like Wessex, in which they had no settlement.

Fighting, perhaps, never wholly abandoned, began again in 882, when Alfred, who had been maturing his plans for the creation of a fleet, engaged the enemy—no doubt a small army, who knew nothing about the Treaty of Wedmore—by sea, captured two ships, slew their crews, and took the rest prisoners. In 884 another "army" came over from France, where they had been on a plundering raid. It is evident that fresh armies would continue to come over, so long as there was the chance of land to be conquered and held.

Guthrun's Treaty bound none but himself and his own followers. This new army divided into two, one half going over to France, and the other half remaining to lay siege to Rochester.

"Before the gate of the town the pagans suddenly erected a strong fortress, but yet they were unable to take the city, because the citizens defended themselves bravely, until King Alfred came up to help them with a large army. Then the pagans abandoned their fortress, and all their horses, which they had brought with them out of France, and leaving behind them in the fortress the greater part of their prisoners, on the arrival of the king fled immediately to their ships, and the Saxons immediately seized on the prisoners and horses left by the pagans; and so the pagans, compelled by stern necessity, returned the same summer to France."

In the same year Alfred's fleet was active, but not with the same success. He sent it from Kent to the coast of East Anglia, where the Danish fleet was attacked and destroyed; but while the sailors were resting after the fight, the Danes fell upon them and gained a victory. In the same year the Danes of East Anglia broke their treaty of peace.

Whether they kept it or not the position of Alfred was now far better than before the Treaty of Wedmore. The seven years of comparative respite had been occupied by Alfred in the consolidation of his realm, the construction of his fleet, and the reform of his army. He had also rebuilt London, and repaired the walls.

For twelve years the great trading City of London—a Mercian City—had been in the hands of the Danes. The same causes which made it a desolate and deserted place when the Saxons came over had operated with the same effect by the

hands of the Danes. Communications inland were cut off; there were no caravans laden with exports making their way from all parts to the port of London; the river was filled with the enemy's ships, so that no merchants could get up to the port; trade of every kind was destroyed, and therefore the very existence of London was destroyed as well. It needs very little consideration to perceive that when the Danes made their winter quarters at London, it was in a city of deserted streets, a port of deserted quays, a place whence all but the people of the "service"—the slaves, the fisher folk, the servants—had fled. This humble folk the Danes spared, for their own use. In 851, twenty years before their occupation, they had taken London by storm, and, of course, sacked it. The City, therefore, had been decaying in 883 for thirty years. No chronicle and no traditions remain of that period of decay and ruin; there are only two or three brief entries in the Chronicle to show that the Danes took the place by storm, that they presently made it their winter quarters, and that Alfred took it from them and repaired it. There is, however, one significant entry which seems to indicate the complete ruin of the City. In 879 the Danes settled down at Fulham. Why at Fulham, since London, one would think, would be a place so much more convenient for an army? In 883, however, Alfred recovered London. The Chronicle describes the event in very doubtful words: "Thanks be to God, they largely obtained the object of their prayer after the vow." However, three years later it is made quite clear that London was in his possession, for he "repaired" the town, and "all the English submitted to him, except those

who were under the bondage of the Danes, and he committed the care of the town to Ethelred, Earl of Mercia," and his brother-in-law. Observe that he did not seize the City and call it his own, as he might have done; he recognized that it was a Mercian City, and he conciliated the Mercians by leaving them in nominal possession of the place.

He found London a scene of desolation; the walls broken down, the gates destroyed, the houses and streets in ruins, the quays—they were of timber laid on piles—rotting away, the bridge broken down; no vessels in the port, no merchants, and no trade. But by this time he had learned the importance of fortifications, and, like the Romans after the massacre by Boadicea, he recognized the enormous strategic importance of the place. Not the least of Alfred's achievements is the establishment of strongholds. He repaired the walls, he made new gates; those of Newgate and Bishopsgate he did not build on the old ruinous foundations, but put one more to the south and the other more to the west. He invited foreign merchants to return, and re-opened the communications with such ports as were not occupied by the Danes. The effect of this work was not only the revival of trade and the return of prosperity to London, but also the creation of a stronghold which was never afterwards taken, although it was often threatened by the combined forces of Dane and Norseman. The independence, the prosperity, the safety of London are due to Alfred's prescience and wisdom.

We are approaching the end of Alfred's wars and also, alas! of Alfred's life, which was one long combat.

The last years of battle are simply but finely described in the Chronicle. In the year 893 a great army of Danes came over from Boulogne.

"That same year the armies from among the East Anglians and from among the Northumbrians harassed the land of the West Saxons, chiefly on the south coast, by praedatory bands; most of all by their esks, which they had built many years before. Then King Alfred commanded long ships to be built to oppose the esks; they were full-nigh twice as long as the others; some had sixty oars, and some had more; they were both swifter and steadier, and also higher than the others. They were shapen neither like the Frisian nor the Danish, but so, as it seemed to him, they would be most efficient. Then, some time in the same year, there came six ships to the Isle of Wight, and there did much harm, as well as in Devon and elsewhere on the sea-coast."

Then came the end. Three years later Alfred died. The year of his death is disputed. Let us leave the controversy to scholars; it is enough for our purpose that Alfred had peace for a brief respite before his death.

If we look back upon the thirty years war of Alfred with the Danes and ask ourselves what it meant, and why it should be remembered a thousand years later, and what it did for the country, I suppose that for a soldier the meagre details of battle after battle are disappointing; in broad outline, however, we can learn what is more important. The campaigns can be generally followed, because we know the natural features, and we know where forest, marsh, and moor interposed to divert the course of an army, or presented an impenetrable obstacle.

The broad outlines are these—

1. The greater part of Saxon England, prac-

tically the whole except the south, was in the hands of the Danes.

2. No help could be looked for from any other part of England.

3. The irruption of the invaders seemed to know no limit. Even when they were hopelessly beaten, ships by the hundred were crossing the seas, containing reinforcements.

4. Every victory was won with great loss, and every victory seemed barren.

5. No treaty was kept; no pledge, however solemn, was held sacred.

Add to these causes of demoralization certain other facts, as, for instance, that there was no standing army as we understand it.

The king had always at his command the small body of landowners, called the *gesiths*, or thanes. They were bound to obey the king's summons to join the host; they were well armed, and clad in mail; they were of courage equal to the Danes, and in tenacity their superiors, but there were few of them. The rest of the people who could also be called out to constitute the fyrd, or the militia, but only by the Witan, were without armour, and imperfectly armed. Now, it would appear that all the Danes were well armed; but, of course, their leaders better than the rank and file.

The Saxons had no cavalry. This seems incredible, because the country possessed horses in plenty, which were seized by the Danes. If the king rode, his horse was held for him outside the battle, while he himself advanced on foot to the forefront, the most dangerous post in the field.

The Saxons had no fortified places. I have already dwelt upon the fact that they disliked

the confinement of walls; they liked the open air; they wanted to meet their enemy in the field, and not to fight him from the shelter of walls. They had not, as yet, arrived at any knowledge of the vital importance of strongholds.

The Saxons had no fleet; they had forgotten their old skill in the building of ships, and their old love of the sea; they had no ships; they had no sailors.

How did Alfred meet these difficulties? In the case of the army we can only arrive at the facts in this respect by considering the work of his son Edward. He enlarged the thanehood; he admitted any ceorl who had "five hides of land, a helm, a mail-shirt, and a sword ornamented with gold;" any ceorl who had the military equipment, even without the land; and every merchant who fared three times across the seas at his own expense. In other words, not only did Alfred enlarge the permanent army, but he began the custom, which has been of incalculable advantage to the country, of recruiting continually into the ranks of the noble class. We may understand the jealousy with which the old nobility regarded the new-comers. It is the vice of an aristocracy that they cannot endure an extension of their numbers. They would form a class absolutely separate, and not to be confused with those below. They have always tried to become such a class; in Germany, in France, in Austria, in Spain, they succeeded in keeping themselves aloof for many centuries. In England they admitted no new-comer for hundreds of years. After the wholesale rise of the new families in the sixteenth century they tried to close their ranks

again. In the eighteenth century the English class of nobles held in their own hands not only the Government of the country, but every post of dignity and position outside the Church and the Law. The House of Lords was theirs, the House of Commons was theirs, they were the heads of all the administrative departments, they commanded the armies and the fleets, they commanded the regiments and the ships, they received all the national distinctions, they held all the places, they created continually new sinecures. It will be one of the great glories of the nineteenth century that it effected the breaking-down of this caste; that it admitted freely new-comers, and created every year new nobles; that it took the greater part of the power out of aristocratic hands, and threw the national distinctions open to the whole of the people. One hopes that in describing the great changes due to this cause, the historian will not fail to notice that Queen Victoria and her Cabinets had been anticipated by Alfred and his Witan.

It was, again, Alfred who first among the Saxons recognized the value of strongholds. On this point I would quote the words of Mr. Oman in Bowker's "Alfred."

"Not only were the towns encouraged to surround themselves with strong ditches and palisades, but 'burhs'—moated mounds girt with concentric rings of ditch and stockade—were erected at strategical points. London recovered from the East Anglian Danes in 886, was made far stronger than it had ever been before by the patching up of its ancient Roman walls. It was filled with a new colony of warlike settlers, and became an outpost of Wessex to the north of the Thames. The consequences of the fact that the larger English towns were no longer open, but well fortified, are clearly seen in Alfred's

later wars. The Danes cannot capture important places at the first rush, as they had done with York, Winchester, and London thirty years before. They have to lay siege to them in full form, and always before the siege is many days old the indefatigable king appears with an army of relief. The invaders had then either to fight, to take to their ships, or to stockade themselves in their entrenchments and suffer a leaguer themselves. Generally they chose the second alternative, as at Rochester in 886, when they abandoned their horses, their stores, and all their heavy plunder, and sailed off the moment that the army of succour came in sight. The same scene occurred at Exeter in 894. The importance of fortified places in keeping the Danes employed till the fyrd could assemble can hardly be exaggerated. The only stronghold which did not serve its purpose was a certain 'work only half constructed in which there were some few countryfolk' near Appledore in Kent. This fell before an attack of the 'Great Army' in 893.

"It would seem that the system by which Alfred's 'burhs' were maintained was not unlike that which Henry the Fowler employed in Germany a generation later. To each stronghold there was allotted, as it would appear, a certain number of 'hides' of land in the surrounding region. All the thegns dwelling on these hides were responsible for the defence of the burh. Probably they were bound to build a house within it, and either to dwell there in person, or to place therein a substitute equally competent with themselves for military purposes. It would seem that the 'cnihten-guilds' of London and several other places were the original associations of these military settlers whom Alfred and his immediate successors had placed in their burhs."

Asser is the chief authority for these statements:—

"What shall I say of the cities and towns which he restored, and of others which he built where none had been before? Of the royal halls and chambers wonderfully erected by his command with stone and wood? Of

the royal vills constructed of stone, removed from their old site, and handsomely rebuilt by the king's command in more fitting places?"

As regards the fleet, Alfred carried on the work begun by his brother Athelstan, after it had been suspended for some years. Athelstan's was an experiment: Alfred's was a piece of fixed policy—he would have a fleet; it was necessary for the repression of the invaders, and for a check to the reinforcements, by which the enemy, year after year, filled up the gaps in their ranks and increased in number. Alfred had none; he would have a fleet of ships, better, larger, swifter, than those of the Danes.

Alfred saved Wessex first, but he saved England as well. But for that stubborn resistance, that keen eye, that active mind, the Saxons in this country would have become like the Britons in the fifth and sixth centuries—a conquered and a despised people, villains, ceorls, and slaves. In all the various races which make up the amalgam which we call English, there is none so valuable as that of Saxon, Jute, and Angle, who between them form the backbone of the country. One may admit the importance to this amalgam of the Celtic element too long ignored by ethnologists; one may admit to the full its value and influence in forming the national character; one may also recognize the influence and importance of the Danes with, in a minor degree, that of those who came after—Norman, Fleming, French Huguenot, and the rest—but the predominant portion is the Saxon; his is the language, his is the history, his are the institutions, his is the great king who made the future—the great and wonderful future—of the Saxon possible.

Then, again, let us repeat that while Alfred was the eye and the brain of the country, the captain and the pilot of the ship, he would have effected nothing but for the virtues—the great and manifold virtues—of his people. He knew them; they would follow if he led. Where his battle-axe rose and fell, gleaming in the sunlight, thither flocked his people. They were bulldogs for grip and tenacity; being bidden to be of good cheer, their hopes revived. When Alfred led them they marched after him with confidence. If we honour and respect Alfred as a warrior, we must also honour and respect his followers, the nameless horde of the Wessex fyrd who fought and fell beside him. Alfred saved England, but his host saved Alfred. Their graves upon the battle-fields are long since levelled with the ground and clean forgotten and out of mind. It is a pity; every fallen warrior's grave is like a finely dressed stone in a noble temple; one would like to have the name carved, imperishable, a name of honour, on these stones. They are all forgotten, every man; but the name of Alfred sums up and represents the virtues of the folk who, against frightful odds, were resolute for freedom. They fought that they themselves might be free; they died that we might live.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER III.

The preceding chapter has shown the long continuance of the wars between Norsemen and Saxons, which began towards the end of the eighth century, and lasted throughout the whole of the following century. I have compiled the following Table from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, in order to show the dates of the principal

events and the places which were attacked by the Danes—written with notes on the civil wars between the English kingdoms. It will be observed, as regards the former, that, for a long time there is no method in the attacks of the pirates from the North. They begin with Northumberland, because that was nearest to them. They turn their attention to other parts of the country. They land on Sheppey, at Charmouth, at Southampton; they storm and sack London and Canterbury; they land at Bridgwater, and so on. No part of the coast was safe from them. Evidently they inquire, one year, into places likely to prove profitable for plundering in years to follow. In course of time they find it unnecessary to go home for the winter. They make their winter quarters at some convenient place on the coast, easily fortified, as Thanet and Sheppey. There they form lasting settlements, from which they are never afterwards dislodged. In the final place they retain the lands they have settled, and here we find their descendants at the present day.

A.D. 787.—The first ships of the Norsemen came to the country, and there was bloodshed.

792.—The King of Mercia murdered the King of East Anglia, and the King of Northumbria was seized and slain.

793.—The "heathen men" came over in force, and ravaged Lindisfarne with much slaughter.

794.—They returned again to Northumberland, and after ravage and plunder, were wrecked by a tempest.

796.—There was war between the kingdoms of Mercia and Kent.

798.—There was a great battle in Northumberland.

800.—Egbert succeeded to the crown of Wessex. In the same year there was a battle with the men of Wiltshire.

806.—The King of the Northumbrians was driven from his throne.

813.—Egbert laid waste West Wales.

821.—A battle between the Welsh and the men of Devon. Defeat and death of the King of Mercia. East Anglia, Kent, Surrey, and Sussex submitted to Egbert.

825.—The King of the Mercians slain in battle.

827.—Egbert completed the conquest of the country, and became Bretwalda.

828.—Egbert invaded North Wales.

832.—Sheppey ravaged by the heathen.

833.—Egbert fought the Danes at Charmouth.

835.—Egbert fought the united armies of Welsh and Danes.

836.—Egbert died.

837.—Fighting against the Danes at Southampton, and at Portland with the Danes.

838.—Fighting against the Danes among the Marshmen, and in Lincolnshire, East Anglia, and Kent.

839.—Great slaughter at London, Canterbury, and Rochester.

844.—Fighting against the Danes at the mouth of the Parret.

851.—A great year of fighting. The men of Devonshire fought the Danes at Wembury, near Plymouth. Athelstan, Alfred's eldest brother, fought them in ships; but the Danes wintered in Thanet. They came, the same year, with 350 ships, up the Thames, took London and Canterbury by storm, defeated the King of the Mercians, and were then defeated, at Oakley, by Ethelwulf and his son Ethelbald.

853.—Ethelwulf fought the North Welsh, and "made them obedient." The men of Kent and Surrey fought the Danes in Thanet.

855.—The Danes wintered in Sheppey.

860.—Storming of Winchester by the Danes.

865.—Ravaging of Kent by the Danes.

866.—Settlement of Danes in East Anglia.

867.—Invasion of Yorkshire by the Danes. Battle before York, and defeat of the English.

868.—The Danes took up their winter quarters in Mercia. Fighting before Nottingham.

869.—The Danes spend a year at York.

870.—Great victories for the Danes in East Anglia.

871.—Battle of Ashdown. Nine battles fought in the south of England.

872.—The Danes wintered in London.

873.—The Danes wintered in Lindsey (Lincolnshire).

874.—The Danes wintered in Repton, and overran the whole of Mercia.
875.—Alfred's first fleet engaged the enemy.
876.—Fighting at Wareham.
877.—The Danes at Exeter.
878.—Fighting in Wessex. Alfred at Athelney.
880.—The Danes settled in East Anglia.
883.—Alfred obtained possession of London.
885.—Fighting at Rochester and off the mouth of the Stour.
886.—Alfred repaired London.
893–895.—Long and stubborn fighting.
896.—Capture of the Danish ships.
897.—Alfred's fleet.
898–901.—Peace.

CHAPTER IV.

ALFRED IN RELIGION.

The dominant aims of Alfred as a king might be arranged in the following order. First, security from the Dane, throughout his reign the only enemy of Wessex. For this purpose everything must be sacrified; security was necessary for all that might follow. Next; in all societies of men there is one common basis: the society must be fed. For this purpose there must be security of cultivation; the farm and the farmer must be protected; the people must be fed. The third aim was the cohesion of all the people one with another; without the power of acting together, and the instinct of acting together as if nothing else was possible, there was no stability of order and security: the country would fall back to its former condition of separate tribal communities, in

which there might be courage but no strength. This necessity involved the administration of justice with an equal hand, ruthless as regards the individual, but beneficent to the community.

Security being provided for as far as was possible, justice, and the sense of justice being recognized, so that there would be no oppressions of one class by another, and the sense of community might be developed and strengthened, the next point of importance was that of religion. And first it must be the religion which ruled the whole of Western Europe. I do not suppose there was ever any question in Alfred's mind as to the truth of the dogmas in which he was educated; the time was not yet arrived for these dogmas to be questioned by him or his people. Apart, however, from the doctrine, it was essential for a country which sought advancement in civilization to belong to the great family—Italian, Spanish, French, German, with all that their modern names signify—of Latin Christianity. The common faith was a bond which seems, indeed, to have held the nations together loosely enough, yet had more strength than we are perhaps ready to acknowledge; it was a form of faith imposed upon the nations by the ecclesiastics, who rested their claims on the inspiration of councils and the authority of the Pope. So long as there was one supreme head of the Church acknowledged by all alike, there would be the same doctrine common to all; the same doctrine, the same services, the same priesthood, the same ritual. The pilgrim on his way to the Holy Land was with his own spiritual kin so long as he found himself within the authority of the Pope; every church was a copy of the churches he had left behind; the

Mass sung in Venice was the same as that sung at Westminster. There were the same words, the same ceremonies, the same vestments, the same priests, to outward seeming. Of course, when the pilgrim was on the Byzantine side of Europe he was among strangers who marked differences of creed, unintelligible to the people, by differences of rites which they could understand. It was of the highest importance, indeed, that there should be a common creed and a common ritual. We have only to remember the wonderful heresies into which ignorant people fall whenever they reasoned out for themselves (being wholly without history, without learning, without power of formulating reason, or arriving at conclusions), to understand the Christian anarchy that would certainly have followed on premature separation from Rome. One man called himself the Christ, another preached vicarious flagellation for the sins of the people, another advocated free love, another created a new sect by a new statement of the Incomprehensible. There was no end to the fancies and the visions which were accepted as realities and served as foundations to new forms of faith. (The modern example of Protestant nations shows also like absurdities into which persons of fair education may fall even at the present day. When, in a time when some education is within the reach of all, we find such forms of faith as the Jezreelites, the Perfectionists, the Oneida Community, with the narrow tenets of Baptists, Seventh Day Sabbatarians, Primitive Methodists, Plymouth Brethren; when we read about the early Quakers, the Fifth Monarchy Men, the believers in Joanna Southcott and Muggleton, the Mormons, the Spiritualists, who

never tire of getting messages without a single word of sense or help from the dead; the horde of cranks, visionaries, and frauds; nay, the ecclesiastical madness which would destroy a venerable Church for the sake of making a smell in a church; when, I say, we consider these things, we cannot overrate the wisdom of those who kept the Christian Church together with one form of faith, one ritual, under one supreme head. In this way, and only in this way, would the people of Wessex be united with the family of nations which were slowly but surely advancing in civilization.

The religion, therefore, which Alfred encouraged was that whose earthly head was the Pope of Rome. The Teutonic mind is naturally inclined to religion. Alfred had, therefore, a receptive material, capable of receiving impressions and of retaining them. Meantime a strange thing had happened. During the time of the Danish success, the Christian religion had been not only trampled upon but exterminated. Perhaps it seems incredible that in a few short years so much should have been destroyed and forgotten. We have, however, to consider a time of great ignorance. Among the common people there was nothing left to keep alive their faith. Every church, every religious house had been destroyed. Perhaps priests and deacons, monks and nuns, scholars and divines, had all been murdered, scattered, or driven across the seas. To the faithful, it seemed, when the monks gathered up the relics, as if their saints were carried away from them. The schools were broken up; the monastic libraries were burned with the houses which contained them. The boys of the thanes grew up without

the least tincture of learning or book-lore, the boys of the common folk without the instruction of the parish priest. Yet, it may be objected, the memory of the religion would survive. Is that so certain? Consider the following case: In March of 1901 there appeared in the papers the copy of a report by a French Colonel. For many years he had been examining the conscripts, asking them, among other things, what they knew of the war of 1870. They *knew nothing —none of them knew anything;* one or two thought that Bismarck was the German Emperor; one or two had a hazy notion that there had been a war, and that France, on the whole, had come out of it badly; even the conscripts from parts of France which were occupied by the enemy, which had felt all the humiliation and the bitterness of defeat and conquest, knew nothing of the war. And this at a time when every rustic learns to read! But, observe, they do not read. How much more readily would things be forgotten when there was no reading, no educated class, no books, no newspapers, no libraries, no schools to teach, and no Church to instruct and to admonish!

Again, the minds of the people, Christianized only for two hundred years, were still full of the old pagan traditions. Christian or pagan, the Saxon remembered the faith of his ancestors, and was as ready to go back to it, if Christianity was taken out of the way, as were the people of London after their first conversion. It was a fierce and cruel religion, although it was full of imagination, as was to be expected of a people in whose minds the noblest poetry was slumbering. There were gods who created and invented; gods who gave life and inspired love; gods who

sent the thunder and the storm; gods who brought the spring and the sunshine, the fruit and the harvest. There were evil gods—the gods of death, who killed men; the gods of disease, who tortured men; the gods of the sea and the river, who drowned men; the gods of battle, who struck men with cowardice, and weighed down their hands so that they could not strike. There were humbler deities—spirits of the stream, the woods, and the hills—for the most part hostile to men and malignant, because in certain stages of civilization the unknown forces of nature present themselves as personal deities who are always hostile to man; according to the Greek legend, for instance, he who met the great god Pan face to face fell down dead. They believed in raising spirits and in spectres, much as some of us do now; they believed in witches and in witchcraft; in magic and in charms; in love philtres; in divination; in lucky days. In a word, the Anglo-Saxon was full of the superstitions which belonged to his age.

There was, however—I venture to read between the lines—one saving clause. The Anglo-Saxon was not only afraid of the unknown, which caused him to invent malignant deities, but in his mind the God of Creation was stronger than the god of destruction. There is hope for a people while that belief survives. Long after he became a Christian the Saxon continued to retain his old beliefs under other names; he saw and conversed in imagination with the old deities whom he had forsaken; they spoke to him in the thunder; he saw their forms in the flying clouds, in the splendour of the sunset; he heard their whispers in the woods; they came to him in

dreams. Religion to the Anglo-Saxon was a thing more real, more present, than it has ever been to any people except the Russian and the Jew.

The king had to lead these people back to the Christian faith, and order matters so that by degrees, though not in his life, they should abandon their ancient superstitions, of which some remain even to the present day.

Again, it was important that the war should be religious. No doubt Alfred firmly believed that the Danes represented the powers of darkness, and that his were the armies of the Lord. How far he impressed this belief upon his followers I know not. To me, however, it seems as if the natural tenacity of the Saxon was doubled by his belief that he was fighting the battles of the Lord; and as Mohammed's followers believed; as the first Crusaders believed; as Cromwell's men believed; as the men of the Mahdi believed; so the men of the Wessex *fyrd* believed; that the gates of Paradise stood wide open for those who fell against the Danes. Why was it that when the Danish chieftain Guthrun begged for terms of peace he consented to be baptized? Surely in recognition that Alfred's God was stronger than his own. A common faith made peace and treaties of peace binding.

Alfred's efforts in the cause of religion began as soon as the Danes were expelled, and continued during the rest of his life with zeal unabated.

Hear the words of his biographer on this point:—

"He attended the Mass and other daily services of religion; he was frequent in psalm-singing and prayer, at the hours both of the day and the night. He also went

to the churches, as we have already said, in the night-time to pray, secretly, and unknown to his courtiers. . . .

"He would avail himself of every opportunity to procure coadjutors in his good designs, to aid him in his strivings after wisdom, that he might attain to what he aimed at; and, like a prudent bird, which, rising in summer with the early morning from her beloved nest, steers her rapid flight through the uncertain tracks of ether, and descends on the manifold and varied flowers of grasses, herbs, and shrubs, essaying that which pleases most, that she may bear it to her home, so did he direct his eyes afar, and seek without that which he had not within, namely, in his own kingdom.

"But God at that time, as some consolation to the king's benevolence, yielding to his complaint, sent certain lights to illuminate him, namely, Werefrith, Bishop of the Church of Worcester, a man well versed in Divine Scripture, who, by the king's command, first turned the books of the 'Dialogues of Pope Gregory and Peter,' his disciple, from Latin into Saxon, and sometimes putting sense for sense, interpreted them with clearness and elegance. After him was Plegmund, a Mercian by birth, Archbishop of the Church of Canterbury, a venerable man, and endowed with wisdom; Ethelstan also, and Werewulf, his priests and chaplains, Mercians by birth, and erudite, These four had been invited out of Mercia by King Alfred, who exalted them with many honours and powers in the kingdom of the West Saxons, besides the privileges which Archbishop Plegmund and Bishop Werefrith enjoyed in Mercia. By their teaching and wisdom the king's desires increased unceasingly, and were gratified,"

Here Asser makes a curious slip. For he tells us that Alfred as yet could not read, and this after he has told us the story about his mother and the illuminated volume. He wanted, however, more scholars.

"Wherefore he sent messengers beyond the sea to Gaul, to procure teachers, and he invited from thence Grimbald, priest and monk, a venerable man and good

singer, adorned with every kind of ecclesiastical discipline and good morals, and most learned in Holy Scripture. He also obtained from thence John, also priest and monk, a man of most energetic talents, and learned in all kinds of literary science, and skilled in many other arts. By the teaching of these men the king's mind was much enlarged, and he enriched and honoured them with much influence. . . .

"Of his fixed purpose of holy meditation, which, in the midst of prosperity and adversity he never neglected, I cannot with advantage now omit to speak. For, whereas he often thought of the necessities of his soul, among the other good deeds to which his thoughts were night and day turned, he ordered that two monasteries should be built, one for monks at Athelney, which is a place surrounded by impassable marshes and rivers, where no one can enter but by boats, or by a bridge laboriously constructed between two other heights; at the western end of which bridge was erected a strong tower of beautiful work, by command of the aforesaid king; and in this monastery he collected monks of all kinds, from every quarter, and placed them therein.

"For at first, because he had no one of his own nation, noble and free by birth, who was willing to enter the monastic life, except children, who could neither choose good nor avoid evil in consequence of their tender years; because for many years previous the love of a monastic life had utterly decayed from that nation as well as from many other nations, though many monasteries still remain in that country; yet, as no one directed the rule of that kind of life in a regular way, for what reason I cannot say, either from the invasions of foreigners, which took place so frequently both by sea and land, or because that people abounded in riches of every kind, and so looked with contempt on the monastic life. It was for this reason that King Alfred sought to gather monks of different kinds to place in the same monastery.

"First he placed there as abbot, John the priest and monk, an old Saxon by birth, then certain priests and deacons from beyond the sea; of whom, finding that he had not as large a number as he wished, he procured as

many as possible of the same Gallic race, some of whom, being children, he ordered to be taught in the same monastery, and at a later period to be admitted to the monastic habit. I have myself seen a young lad of pagan birth who was educated in that monastery, and by no means the hindmost of them all. . . .

"Another monastery, also, was built by the same king as a residence for nuns, near the eastern gate of Shaftesbury; and his own daughter, Ethelgiva, was placed in it as abbess. With her many other noble ladies, bound by the rules of the monastic life, dwell in that monastery. These two edifices were enriched by the king with much land, as well as personal property."

The Abbey of Athelney has now completely vanished. No trace remains either of the foundations or of the fortifications said to have been erected on the hill. The abbey is said to have been small, but of great magnificence. Relics and fragments have been from time to time dug up, including the famous Alfred jewel, now preserved in the Bodleian at Oxford. Not far from Athelney is a knoll called Borough Bridge. It is higher and steeper than that of Athelney. There are evident marks of former fortifications. On the top are the remains of a cruciform church containing many details of an ancient character. From the base of the hill a causeway led to another knoll near Othery, on which was another fort. It has been suggested that Borough Bridge was the true site of Alfred's fortified place. I do not know whether the point has been investigated, but it seems certain that where the fortifications were there would be the monastic house as well.

The nunnery of Shaftesbury, on the other hand, had a much more glorious history. Alfred's daughter was, as we have seen, the first abbess.

Athelstan and Edmund Ironside were benefactors to the House. The body of Edward the Martyr was transferred here from Wanham by Dunstan. Pilgrims resorted to the tomb of the martyr, where miracles were continually wrought. In 1001 Ethelred gave the nuns the town of Bradford for a retreat, if necessary, from the Danes. Canute died here. The abbey became one of the richest in England. After the Dissolution the buildings were destroyed, and gradually razed to the ground. But in 1861 excavations brought to light some of the foundations and walls of the house. It would be interesting to continue these excavations, and to recover, if possible, the tombs of the Saxon princes and queens buried within the church.

The extraordinary difficulty in finding monks for this new monastery is very significant. The life of prayer and meditation was no longer attractive; man's pilgrimage had become earthward, not heavenward. The claustral life is only possible when there is a certain reasonable amount of safety. No one can meditate profitably amid flying rumours of a fierce enemy at a few miles' distance burning and murdering and pillaging. In a time of general danger and continual fighting the young and able monk must take up his pike, tuck up his frock, and fare forth to take his share in the defence as much as any ploughboy. To retreat within the walls of a convent amid the clash of arms, while the rest of the people are fighting in the field, seems to the monk's compeers —doubtless it actually is—an act of treason and cowardice. Therefore, when the Religious Orders were dispersed and their houses burned, we may readily believe that many monks exchanged the

frock for the leathern jerkin, and the Book of Hours for the pike. And we may still more readily understand that when a new monastery was built on the ruins of the old, the fighting men held aloof from it, and refused to enter it. Dunstan, when he rebuilt Westminster, a little later, had the same difficulty.

North Porch and Church.

SAXON CHURCH, SEVENTH OR EIGHTH CENTURY, BRADFORD-ON-AVON.

As regards the laws which concern religion, I will speak of them soon, and as regards the scholars whom he invited to his Court, I will also speak later on.

Returning to Alfred's personal piety, he re-

solved, whenever he could—that is, whenever he was not on a campaign—to give to the service of God half the day. It is not quite clear what he meant by the service of God. To modern ideas,

View of Interior, showing very remarkable Chancel Arch and Entrance.

SAXON CHURCH, SEVENTH OR EIGHTH CENTURY, BRADFORD-ON-AVON.

the daily business of king, judge, and commander-in-chief may be, and should be, a far nobler and higher form of service than a form of prayer in a church, while one can hardly believe that the king could possibly devote twelve hours out of the

twenty-four to prayer and meditation. Suppose the half day means the half of the time left after deducting the hours of sleep, of food and refreshment, and of the daily routine. This method of calculation would give three or four hours a day at the outside to the prayers which were intended for the benefit of his own soul.

It is, however, to some such division that Asser ascribes the invention of Alfred's method of measuring time when the sun was not apparent. He made six wax candles, of equal length, each of which was divided by lines into twelve equal parts. These candles he kept lighted day and night before the precious relics which he carried with him everywhere.

"Sometimes, when they would not continue burning a whole day and night, till the same hour that they were lighted the preceding evening, from the violence of the wind, which blew day and night without intermission through the doors and windows of the churches, the fissures of the divisions, the plankings, or the wall, or the thin canvas of the tents, they then unavoidably burned out and finished the course before the appointed time; the king, therefore, considered by what means he might shut out the wind, and so by a useful and cunning invention, he ordered a lantern to be beautifully constructed of wood and white ox-horn, which, when skilfully planed till it is thin, is no less transparent than a vessel of glass. This lantern, therefore, was wonderfully made of wood and horn, as we before said, and by night a candle was put into it, which shone as brightly without as within, and was not extinguished by the wind; for the opening of the lantern was also closed up, according to the king's command, by a door of horn.

"By this contrivance, then, six candles, lighted in succession, lasted four and twenty hours, neither more nor less, and, when those were extinguished, others were lighted."

The wind whistling through the cracks of the wooden walls makes one fear that even the Royal Palace was not absolutely a place of comfort. But far down into the later ages the draughts were the cause of continual toothache and cold, so that the men wore their caps with hanging sides in the house as well as out of it.

He gave half his time—in whatever way he understood it—to the service of God: he also gave half his income. We must understand by this half of what was left after the expenses of the government. Alfred divided the whole into two parts. The first part was divided into three, of which one division went to defray the expenses of the court—even the court of a Wessex king was maintained with much ceremony, hospitality, and expense; the second division went to his craftsmen, of whom he maintained a great many; the third to encourage the visits of foreigners. The other half was destined to the service of God, namely, one fourth part for the poor, one fourth for the two monasteries of Athelney and Shaftesbury, one fourth for his schools, and one fourth for other monasteries. Such was the practical side of the religion of King Alfred.

CHAPTER V.

ALFRED AS LAW-GIVER.

"We were all despoiled," said Alfred in his book, "by the heathen folk." It was a time when words were used with strict reference to

their meaning and without exaggeration, save by ecclesiastics. "We were all despoiled." The whole land was "despoiled" of everything. The old things were swept away—the venerable customs, the laws, the instructions of the people, with their churches, their religion, their towns and their settlements. It would seem as if there has never been a wreck so complete as that of Saxon England after the irruption of the Danes. Among other things, the laws were swept away and quickly forgotten. Imagine, if you can, the sudden removal from the streets of the policeman and of the authority which stands behind him, the closing of all the courts, criminal and civil, the burning of all the law books, silence as regards any laws, even the Ten Commandments. How long would the memory of the old laws remain with us? At present we are hedged round on every side, and we do not feel the restrictions. "This and this ye shall not do." We grow up in the midst of prohibitions; we are unconscious of them. How long should we be unconscious of them if they were removed? How long should we recognize the obligation neither to steal nor to murder when we might steal and murder as much as we pleased, subject to the condition that the possessor would defend his property and his life by arms? This was exactly the situation in Wessex. The policeman was gone, the judge was gone, the prison and the executioner was gone; nothing was left. Alfred had to undertake the task of restoring laws as well as religion to his country. The people had to be lifted up again to the old standard, spiritual, moral, and intellectual—a gigantic task, even though the country was small. and the population was num-

bered by thousands instead of millions. Civil government was paralyzed; the king's treasury was empty; the towns and settlements were in ruins.

Alfred began the restoration, so far as the laws were concerned, by issuing what we should now call a new and revised edition of the old laws. Observe that an enthusiast, a crank, a king who desired to impress his own views upon the people, one who believed that a new constitution could be invented and imposed upon the ignorant mass, would have started afresh with everything new; Alfred would have drawn up a body of laws based upon Roman law, as that known to the scholars, his friends. I do not believe that he was ever tempted in this direction at all. On the other hand, he seems to have understood the great fact, the cardinal fact, that if laws are to possess an abiding influence, if they are to form and direct the mind, to govern the conduct, to be the laws of the people for the people, then they must be the growth of centuries and generations; they must embody and represent the national characteristics. Now, successful institutions — those which the people adopt—possess a double distinction; they lead and they represent. They lead the minds of the young, and they represent the minds of the old; they preserve the national character, and they are the outcome of the national character. Now, the laws and customs of all the peoples in Saxon England—Saxons, Jutes, and Angles—were similar because they had the same origin; they were also different because they had developed without reference to each other. They had grown with the people, and were the outcome of the national character.

Alfred took over as the foundation of his work for Wessex the code compiled for the West Saxons by his ancestor, King Ine; for Mercia, that compiled by Offa, King of Mercia; for the Jutes, that compiled by Ethelbert, King of Kent. In his work, two main principles guided the law-giver: first, that justice should be provided for every one, high and low, rich and poor; next, that the Christian religion should be recognized as containing the Law of God, which must be the basis of all laws. Both these principles were especially necessary to be observed at this time. The devastation of the long wars had caused justice to be neglected; and the destruction of the churches, and the murder or flight of the clergy, had caused the people to relapse into their old superstitions.

King Alfred then boldly began his code by reciting the Laws of God. His opening words were: "Thus saith the Lord, I am the Lord thy God." That is his keynote. The laws of a people must conform with the Laws of God. If they are contrary to the spirit of these Laws they cannot be righteous laws. In order that every one might himself compare his laws with the Laws of God, he prefaced his laws first by the Ten Commandments; after this he quoted at length certain chapters of the Mosaic Law. These chapters he followed by the short epistle in the Acts of the Apostles concerning what should be expected and demanded of Christians. Finally, Alfred adds the precept from St. Matthew, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

Some writers have assumed that Alfred required of his subjects by this preamble that they

should be governed in all the details of life by the Mosaic Law. This view I cannot accept. Alfred set forth, I think, these laws in order that his own might be compared with them where comparison was possible, and in order to challenge comparison and to give the greater weight to his own laws by showing that they were based in spirit and *mutatis mutandis*, on the Levitical Law and on the Law of the Gospel.

Moreover, in order to connect the whole system of justice with religion, in order to teach the people in the most efficacious manner possible that the Church desires justice above all things, he added to the sentence of the judge the penance of the Church. This subjection of the law to the Church would seem intolerable to us. At that time it was necessary to make a rude, ignorant, and violent people understand that religion must be more than a creed: that it must have a practical and restraining side; a man who was made to understand that an offence against the law was an offence against the Church, which would be punished by the latter as well as by the secular judge, was made for the first time to feel the reality of the Church.

This firm determination to link the Divine Law and the human law; this firm reliance on the Divine Law as the foundation of all law, is to me the most characteristic point in the whole of Alfred's work. The view, the intention, the purpose of King Alfred are summed up, without intention, by the poet whom I have already quoted. The following words of Rudyard Kipling might be the very words of Alfred; they breathe his very spirit —they might be, I say, the very words spoken by Alfred:—

"Keep ye the law: be swift in all obedience—
Clear the land of evil: drive the road and bridge the ford:
Make ye sure to each his own
That he reap where he hath sown:
By the Peace among our Peoples let men know we serve the Lord!"

Alfred's code was not founded on that of King Ine, or Ina (688–726). It did not abolish the older code, but it revised and improved it; as we say now, brought it up to date. We must not claim for Alfred the creation of English law.

His glory consists mainly in his adaptation of the old order to the new; he took all that was left of the shattered past and moulded it anew, with additions to suit the new situation, and for the most part on the same lines. You will ask, perhaps, how much of the honour due to Alfred's achievements should be given to his ministers and how much to himself? Assign to his officers all the credit possible, all that belongs to the faithful discharge of duty; still the initiative, the design of the whole work, is absolutely due to Alfred himself. He must not be considered as a modern king—the modern king reigns while the people rule; he was the king who ruled, his will ruled the land, he had his Parliament, his Meeting of the Wise, but his will ruled them; he appointed his earls or aldermen, his will ruled them; he had his bishops, his will ruled them. From the time when he began to address himself to the organization of a strong nation—that is to say, from the time when the Dane was baptized, his will ruled supreme. No law existed then to limit the king's prerogative. The king was imperator, commander

of the army, and every man in the country was his soldier.

That a new departure was deliberately adopted is proved from the opening above cited. These words, this opening, this connection of the laws of Wessex with the laws of God are the recognition of the fact that all good laws, as all good things of every kind, are the gift of God, and inspired by Him. Before Alfred's time the laws were supported by tradition, they were ancestral, they belonged to the prehistoric times, they were invented by the gods and heroes of buried time.

The closing words of Alfred's Dialogue are as follows:—

"I, Alfred the King, gathered these [laws] together, and ordered many to be written which our forefathers held, such as I approved, and many which I approved not I rejected, and had other ordinances enacted with the counsel of my Witan; for I dared not venture to set much of my own upon the statute-book, for I knew not what might be approved by those who should come after us. But such ordinances as I found, either in the time of my kinsman Ine, or of Offa, King of the Mercians, or of Ethelberht, who first received Baptism in England—such as seemed to me rightest I have collected here, and the rest I have let drop.

"I, then, Alfred, King of the West Saxons, showed these laws to all my Witan, and they then said that they all approved of them as proper to be holden."

In this place it is not necessary to consider at length the English laws of Alfred or those which followed after his time and until the Norman Conquest. The tenacity of affection with which the laws and customs of Edward the Confessor were regarded by the people, and especially by

the people of London, was a proof that they had become part and parcel of the national mind. These laws were not made like our own. Cases brought before the Courts were conducted with the strictest adherence to forms. The oath of the plaintiff or defendant, backed by that of his friends, who swore that this oath was true, constitued the trial. There were rules as to the number of persons required to stand by a man, and the number required to balance the oath of a *thegn*, a *ceorl*, or a *theow*. There were also the ordeals—that of eating bread which would choke the perjured man; the ordeal of cold water; the ordeal of hot water; the ordeal of hot iron. The ordeal by battle was not practised by the Saxons, and after the Norman Conquest the people continually agitated for a release from the obligation of fighting an enemy or a plaintiff. All other ordeals, observe, could be evaded. The water did not always boil, nor did it always scorch the arm; the bread did not always choke; the iron was not intolerably hot; but in the ordeal of battle a man had to slay or be slain. The Lord of Truth would reveal the guilt or the innocence of the accused; the gallows stood beside the field of battle ready for the defeated man—a terrible ordeal, from which there was no escape for the perjurer.

The penalties for manslaughter and acts of violence took the form of fines. There was a tariff of fines. Any man's price was laid down in accordance with his position; a thane was worth six times as much as a common man, and his worth counted for six common oaths before the court; the family were helpers or avengers. All transactions in property were conducted

openly and before witnesses, in order to avoid any charge of dealing with stolen property.

He who stole on Sunday, or at Christmas, or Easter, or Holy Thursday, or on Rogation Days, or during Lent, was to pay twice the penalty ordered in such cases. If a man revealed an offence, not discovered in confession, it was to be half forgiven. In treason against king or lord there was to be no mercy, and no fine, "because God Almighty adjudged no mercy to those who despised Him, nor did Christ, the Son of God, adjudge any to him who sold him to death."

There were frequent holidays—twelve days at Yule; the day on which Christ overcame the devil; the commemoration of St. Gregory; a fortnight at Easter; one day at St. Peter's-tide; one day at St. Paul's-tide; in harvest the week before St. Mary-mass; one day at the celebration of All Hallows; and the four Wednesdays in Ember Week. Observe how laws, punishments, holidays,—all are brought into connection with the Church; a measure which, one must readily acknowledge, was the most beneficial to the nation that could be possibly discovered and applied.

That many of the laws were harsh, that many of them belonged to a rude and still primitive time, that they did not include in their net many practices and iniquities which belong to a more complex time, that many things are cruel—all this belongs to the century and to the actual levels of the people. As regards cruelty, punishment to be deterrent must be swift, must be certain, must be intelligible by all; to hurl a woman into the river, to burn a slave—all would understand so much. On the other hand, leniency, had it been possible to one of Alfred's century, would

have been taken for weakness or for cowardice. It was, above all things, necessary that the power of the king, which meant the power of the law, should be felt at every turn. Take, for instance, the origin and the development of the "King's Peace." On this point I venture to quote the words of a learned lawyer (Pollock, in Bowker's "Alfred," p. 228) :—

"Far more significant for the future development of English law are the beginnings of the king's peace. In later times this became a synonym for public order maintained by the king's general authority; nowadays we do not easily conceive how the peace which lawful men ought to keep can be any other than the queen's or the commonwealth's. But the king's justice, as we have seen, was at first not ordinary but exceptional, and his power was called to aid only when other means had failed. To be in the king's peace was to have a special protection, a local or personal privilege. Every free man was entitled to peace in his own house, the sanctity of the homestead being one of the most ancient and general principles of Teutonic law. The worth set on a man's peace, like that of his life, varied with his rank, and thus the king's peace was higher than any other man's. Fighting in the king's house was a capital offence from an early time. Gradually the privileges of the king's house were extended to the precincts of his court, to the army, to the regular meetings of the shire and hundred, and to the great roads. Also the king might grant special personal protection to his officers and followers; and these two kinds of privilege spread until they coalesced and covered the whole ground. The more serious public offences were appropriated to the king's jurisdiction; the king's peace was used as a special sanction for the settlement of blood-feuds, and was proclaimed on various solemn occasions; it seems to have been specially prominent—may we say as a "frontier regulation"?—where English conquest and settlement were recent. In the generation before the Conquest it was, to all appearance, extending

fast. In this kind of development the first stage is a really exceptional right; the second is a right which has to be distinctly claimed, but is open to all who will claim it in the proper form; the third is the "common right" which the courts will take for granted. The Normans found the king's peace nearing, if not touching, the second stage."

With these introductions we can read Asser's words with profit and understanding:—

"The king showed himself a minute investigator of the truth in all his judgements, and this especially for the sake of the poor, to whose interest, day and night, among other duties of this life, he ever was wonderfully attentive. For in the whole kingdom the poor, besides him, had a few or no protectors; for all the powerful and noble of that country had turned their thought rather to secular than to heavenly things: each was more bent on secular matters, to his own profit, than on the public good.

"He strove also, in his own judgements, for the benefit of both the noble and the ignoble, who often perversely quarrelled at the meetings of his earls and officers, so that hardly one of them admitted the justice of what had been decided by the earls and prefects; and in consequence of this pertinacious and obstinate dissension, all desired to have the judgement of the king, and both sides sought at once to gratify their desire. But if any one was conscious of injustice on his side in the suit, though by law and agreement he was compelled, however reluctant, to go before the king, yet with his own good will he never would consent to go. For he knew that in the king's presence no part of his wrong would be hidden; and no wonder, for the king was a most acute investigator in passing sentence, as he was in all other things. He inquired into almost all the judgements which were given in his own absence, throughout all his dominion, whether they were just or unjust. If he perceived there was iniquity in those judgements, he summoned the judges, either through his own agency, or through others of his faithful servants, and asked them mildly, why they had

judged so unjustly, whether through ignorance or malevolence, *i.e.*, whether for the love or fear of any one, or hatred of others, or also for the desire of money. At length, if the judges acknowledged they had given judgement because they knew no better, he discreetly and moderately reproved their inexperience and folly in such terms as these: 'I wonder truly at your insolence, that, whereas by God's favour and mine, you have occupied the rank and office of the wise, you have neglected the studies and labours of the wise. Either, therefore, at once give up the discharge of the temporal duties which you hold, or endeavour more zealously to study the lessons of wisdom. Such are my commands.' At these words the earls and prefects would tremble, and endeavour to turn all their thoughts to the study of justice, so that, wonderful to say, almost all his earls, prefects, and officers, though unlearned from their cradles, were sedulously bent upon acquiring learning, choosing rather laboriously to acquire the knowledge of a new discipline than to resign their functions; but if any one of them from old age or slowness of talent was unable to make progress in liberal studies, he commanded his son, if he had one, or one of his kinsmen, or if there was no other person to be had, his own freedman or servant, whom he had some time before advanced to the office of reading, to recite Saxon books before him night and day, whenever he had any leisure, and they lamented with deep sighs, in their inmost hearts, that in their youth they had never attended to such studies; and they blessed the young men of our days, who happily could be instructed in the liberal arts, whilst they execrated their own lot, that they had not learned these things in their youth, and now, when they are old, though wishing to learn them, they are unable."

Alfred's work as a law-giver is summed up by J. A. Green ("History of the English People," p. 92):—

"In Wessex itself, spent by years of deadly struggle, with law, order, the machinery of justice and government weakened by the pirate storm, material and moral civili-

zation had alike to be revived. His work was of a simple and practical order. In politics as in war, or in his after dealings with letters, he took what was closest at hand and made the best of it. In the reorganization of public justice his main work was to enforce submission to the justice of hundred-moot and shire-moot alike on noble and ceorl, 'who were constantly at obstinate variance with one another in the folk-moots, so that hardly any one of them would grant that to be true doom that had been judged for doom by the ealdorman and reeves.' . . .

"Of a new legislation the king had no thought. 'Those things which I met with,' he tells us, 'either of the days of Ine, my kinsman, or of Offa, King of the Mercians, or of Æthelberht, who first among the English race received Baptism, those which seemed to me rightest, those I have gathered, and rejected the others.' But unpretending as the work might seem, its importance was great. With it began the conception of a national law. The notion of separate systems of tribal customs for the separate peoples passed away; and the codes of Wessex, Mercia, and Kent blended in the doom-book of a common England."

Or, in the words of Sir Frederick Pollock—

"If we do not nowadays observe King Alfred's dooms, or anything like them, still we owe it to the work of Alfred and his children that England was saved to become an individual nation, and that our fundamental ideas of justice have survived all external changes. Those ideas may be summed up very shortly. Justice is essentially public; the business of parties is to conduct their cases according to the rules of law, the business of the court is to hear and determine between them, not to conduct an inquiry; judicial interpretation of the law is the only authentic and binding interpretation, and in particular the executive has no such power. These principles appear obvious to most of us, but there are many civilized countries where they are not admitted. We can trace them back to the rudest beginnings of our jurisprudence; they are as vigorous as ever, in all the complexity of modern affairs, wherever the English tongue is spoken."

CHAPTER VI.

ALFRED AS EDUCATOR.

THERE can be no doubt whatever that Alfred was from childhood imbued with a deep reverence for letters. The story about the illuminated book sufficiently indicates the fact. It has been already suggested that Judith, his step-mother, not Osburh, his mother, played the leading part in that history. Perhaps; we must remember, however, that even in the case of Judith the dates do not hold together. Alfred was nine years of age at the death of his father, and the incestuous marriage of his brother Ethelbald with Judith, who thus became his sister-in-law. When he was eleven, Ethelbald died, and Judith went back to France. The theory consequently falls to the ground, and has no other point in its favour than that Judith's father, Charles the Bald, was rich in illuminated books and in the company of scholars. Still, we may, as I said before, accept the story without too much curiosity as to its origin and literal truth. It strikes a note.

We have seen how Alfred, as soon as some kind of order and security had been re-established, called divines and scholars to his court. We next hear that he created a school, at which his own sons and the sons of thanes and nobles were educated. As for himself he certainly could read, because he learned by heart the daily prayers and many of the psalms, and to assist himself he read them out of a book in which they were written down. But it would appear that he read with difficulty. Asser, his biographer, had

the duty of reading to him, and of making for him a manual of quotations, and things worthy of remembrance. Asser (already quoted on this point) thus speaks of Alfred's imperfect education—

"This he confessed, with many lamentations and sighs, to have been one of his greatest difficulties and impedimets in this life, namely, that when he was young and had the capacity for learning, he could not find teachers; but when he was more advanced in life he was harassed by so many diseases unknown to all the physicians of this island, as well as by internal and external anxieties of sovereignty, and by continual invasions of the pagans, and had his teachers and writers also so much disturbed, that there was no time for reading. But yet among the impediments of this present life, from infancy up to the present time, and, as I believe, even until his death, he continued to feel the same insatiable desire of knowledge."

The mind of the king on the subject of education is laid open in his Epistle to the Bishops, which forms a preface to the "Cura Pastoralis," of which we shall speak in another place. The preface itself is as follows:—

"King Alfred bids greet Bishop Waerferth with his words lovingly and with friendship; and I let it be known to thee that it has very often come into my mind what wise men there formerly were throughout England, both of sacred and secular orders; and how happy times there were then throughout England; and how the kings who had power over the nations in those days obeyed God and his ministers, and they preserved peace, morality, and order at home, and at the same time enlarged their territory abroad; and how they prospered both with war and with wisdom; and also the sacred orders, how zealous they were both in teaching and learning and in all the services they owed to God; and how foreigners came

to this land in search of wisdom and instruction, and how we should now have to get them from abroad if we were to have them. So general was its decay in England that there were very few on this side of the Humber who could understand their rituals in English or translate a letter from Latin into English; and I believe there were not many beyond the Humber. There were so few of them that I cannot remember a single one south of the Thames when I came to the Throne.

"Thanks be to God Almighty that we have any teachers among us now!

"And therefore I command thee to do as I believe thou art willing, to disengage thyself from worldly matters as often as thou canst, that thou mayest apply the wisdom which God has given thee wherever thou canst. Consider what punishments would come upon us on account of this world, if we neither loved it (wisdom) ourselves nor suffered other men to attain it; we should love the name only of Christian, and very few of the virtues. When I considered all this I remembered also how I saw before it had been all ravaged and burnt, how the churches throughout the whole of England stood filled with treasures and books, and there was also a great multitude of God's servants, but they had very little knowledge of the books, for they could not understand anything of them because they were not written in their own language. As if they had said—

"'Our forefathers who formerly held these places loved wisdom, and through it they obtained wealth, and bequeathed it to us. In this we can still see their tracks, but we cannot follow them, and therefore we have lost both the wealth and the wisdom, because we would not incline our hearts after their example.'

"When I remembered all this, I wondered extremely that the good and wise men who were formerly all over England, and had perfectly learned all the books, did not wish to translate them into their own language. But again I soon answered myself and said—

"'They did not think that men would ever be so careless, and that learning would so decay.

"'Through that they abstained from it, and they

wished that the wisdom in this land might increase with our knowledge of languages.'

"Then I remembered how the law was first known in Hebrew, and again, when the Greeks had learned it, they translated the whole of it into their own language and all other books beside. And again the Romans, when they had learned it, they translated the whole of it through learned interpreters into their own language. And also all other Christian nations translated a part of them into their own language. Therefore it seems better to me, if ye think so, for us also to translate *some books which are most needful for all men to know*, into the language we can all understand, and for *you to do as we very easily can if we have tranquillity enough*—i.e. *that all the youth now in England of free men, who are rich enough to be able to devote themselves to it, is set to learn as long as they are not fit for any other occupation, until that they are well able to learn English writing; and let those be afterwards taught more in the Latin language who are to continue learning, and be promoted to a higher rank.*

"When I remember how the knowledge of Latin had formerly decayed throughout England, and yet many could read English writing, I began, among other various and manifold troubles of this kingdom, to translate into English the book which is called in Latin 'Pastoralis,' and in English 'Shepherd's book,' sometimes word by word and sometimes according to sense, as I had learned it from Plegmund my archbishop, and Asser my bishop, and Grimbold my mass-priest, and John my mass-priest. And when I had learned it as I could best understand it, and as I could most clearly interpret it, I translated it into English, and I will send a copy to every bishopric in my kingdom; and on each there is a clasp worth fifty mancus. And I command in God's name that no man take the clasp from the book, or the book from the minister; it is uncertain how long there may be such learned bishops as now, thanks be to God, there are everywhere; therefore I wish them always to remain in their place unless the bishop wish to take them with him or they be lent out anywhere, or any one make a copy from them."

The plea for translation is modern in its spirit. We want, he says, the translation of those books which are most needful for men to learn; we want also all the youth of England—all the sons of freemen—to learn how to read. Those who are rich enough and of higher rank may afterwards learn Latin; but let us give books in English for the guidance of everybody. Of all Alfred's work this preface seems to me the most human, the wisest, and the most sympathetic.

Part of his design in the rebuilding of the monasteries was the restoration of the monastic schools. There was in every convent of the time—they were all under Benedictine rule—the school. The House was not only the retreat of pious men and women, but it was also the only possible home of learning and the only place for a school.

It is long since we have regarded a monastery as a seat of learning, or the proper place for a school. Go back to Alfred's time and consider what a monastery meant in a land still full of violence, in which morals had been lost, justice trampled down, learning destroyed, no schools or teachers left. The monastery stood as an example and a reminder of self-restraint, peace, and order; a life of industry and such works as the most ignorant must acknowledge to be good; where the poor and the sick were received and cared for, the young were taught, and the old sheltered. It was the life which the monastery rule professed; the aim rather than any lower standards accepted by the monks, which made him a monastery in that age like a beacon steadily and brightly burning, so that the people had always before their eyes a reminder of the self-governed life.

They had also before their eyes the spectacle of the scholar's life; learning, to be sure, was at a low ebb, still it was learning—of a kind.

In the cause of education, indeed, Alfred was before his age, and even before our age. He desired universal education. At his court he provided instructors for his children and the children of the nobles. They learned to read and write, they studied their own language and its poetry, they learned Latin, and they learned what they called the "liberal sciences," among them the art of music. But he thought also of the poorer class. "My desire," he says, "is that all the freeborn youths of my people may persevere in learning until they can perfectly read the English scriptures." Unhappily he was unable to carry out this wish. Only in our own days has been at last attempted the dream of the Saxon king—the extension of education to the whole people.

The ordinary monastic school taught the novices and the abbot's wards, and whatever scholars came from the outside, the elements of reading and writing, with Catechism, or question and answer on common things, the poetry of the country, and some elements of Latin. But there were "High Schools," as we might call them, in which the studies were carried much further, including the scholastic philosophy, grammar, versification, and such science as was then attainable. Greek, as well as Latin, is said to have been taught in these schools, but to what extent I know not; certainly there were MSS. of Aristotle.

Some of the grammar schools still existing in this country have been traced back to times before the Norman Conquest. It would be inter-

esting if we could connect any of them with the foundations of Alfred.

He would have educated the whole people. That is the cardinal fact as regards Alfred's position as an educator.

CHAPTER VII.

ALFRED AS WRITER.

ALFRED, above all and before all, was a reformer; he was a conservative reformer who desired to rebuild the past, to restore the past, to present the past on new foundations and with a view to possible developments in the future. Now the reformer, in all ages, is liable to the same error or danger. If he is one in authority, king or minister, he is generally contented with giving an order. History is crammed full of the most praiseworthy and excellent orders. Their enforcement is entrusted to officers, overseers, and the police. What happens continually is that the executive betrays its trust; either it imposes the new orders upon the people oppressively and harshly, or it neglects them altogether, or it attempts against the will of the people to enforce them occasionally and fitfully, with the result of exasperating them and making the law odious. There have been more hindrances to advancement, caused by the enactment of good laws, than by the neglect of bad laws. Above all, this may be seen in the continual proclamation of ordinance for the better government of London. There must be no neglected streets, there must be no

throwing of refuse into the streets, there must be no fires, and therefore no timbered houses, there must be no beggars, vagabonds, or masterless men in the City, there must be lights in every street after dark, no taverns must be open after curfew, no one must walk the streets at night, no one must carry arms at night, and so on; these laws were proclaimed over and over again, yet they all became so many dead letters.

In the same way, the reformer who is not in authority clamours perpetually for new laws; he also leaves the enforcement of the new laws to the executive, with the same result. It never occurs to the reformer or the Radical, that even if he had his own way, even if he got his laws passed, the world would be no further advanced unless the new laws represented the mind and the will of the people. Nor does the Radical reformer even reflect that the wise statesman attempts no reform unless he knows that the mind of the people is with him. He waits, as Gladstone said, until the question is ripe.

This digression may seem to have little or nothing to do with Alfred. On the contrary, it has everything to do with him; for he accompanied all his endeavours in civilizing and advancing the people, not by new laws which would be strange to them, and would only embarrass and fetter and irritate them, but by educational steps, and by personal supervision. He did not put his trust in new laws; he did, however, put his trust in the old laws newly edited; he did not leave the carrying out of new laws to any officers, nor even to his judges; he did not hope for reform by the imposition of new laws and the introduction of new customs. He worked by means

of the old things. He founded monasteries, but according to the old Benedictine Rule with which the people were acquainted; he filled them with scholars and divines, not with those who might, perhaps, if they proved zealous, become scholars and divines. In everything that he attempted he inducted an educational method which should prepare the way for new advance upon old lines. Especially is this to be remarked in his writings, every one of which was intended for educational purposes. Among the many points, for instance, in which the ignorance of his people was an obstacle to their improvement was their ignorance of the outer world. To the ordinary man of Wessex, thane or ceorl, the bright light of day shone only upon his own farm, village, or settlement; outside, mist and fog began, growing thicker the further he looked, until a wall of impenetrable darkness, pierced here and there by gleams of light, barred the prospect. The wall of darkness hid the whole of the outside world; the gleams of light came from the well-known and well-trodden paths which led the pilgrim to Rome and even beyond. The fog and mist which lay between his village and the wall of black night covered the lands of other nations—the East Saxon, the Anglican, and the Jute.

Alfred, in his wisdom, perceived that if his country was to join the families of Western Europe it must not only belong to the newer faith, but it must enter into communication with those families; it must understand what lay beyond the wall; it must push back the darkness. He therefore undertook the task—it would have been considered the work of a whole life in any other man—of making known to his people all

that there was to be known of history and geography.

Between four and five hundred years before this time there lived a certain theologian and scholar named Paulus Orosius. By birth he was a Spaniard. He became, however, a friend of St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, by whom he was sent into Palestine, there to attack and to disprove the Pelagian heresy, one of the many unintelligible interpretations of the Incomprehensible which were then flying about Christendom, and vexing the mind ecclesiastical and orthodox. Among other countries, Syria, always a ground fruitful in the straw-splittings of theology, had become infected with this heresy. Orosius, armed with the weapons of orthodoxy, journeyed thither, and, in due course, held conferences and disputes with the heretics. Finding that he made no impression upon them, he retired, consoling himself with a box full of the bones of St. Stephen, providentially recovered for him while he was in Jerusalem. He returned, therefore, to Africa, where in time he died. In the early part of the fifth century, when Orosius flourished, the minds of people were everywhere disquieted with the calamities and the miseries of the time. The Roman Empire was falling to pieces; Rome itself —the city sacred to Christians for the martyrdom of Peter, and to the pagan for the long glories of the past—had been taken and sacked by Alaric. Not even the overthrow of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem, eight hundred years afterwards, created so profound a feeling of despair as this taking of Rome in 410. "Behold," cried the people, "the anger of the old gods! It is by them, on account of their neglect and overthrow, that

these miseries have happened to the world. Where are the gods of the Christians, that they cannot help?" Orosius took upon himself to issue a reply to this question and to these doubts. He wrote a book in which he proved—it was not difficult—that similar calamities had in every age fallen upon the human race; that wars, defeats, sieges, massacres, devastations, plague, famine, fire, had been the continual history of the world; that, if the ancient gods were responsible for these calamities at a time when no one believed in them, they were also responsible for them at a time when everybody believed in them; these things could not, therefore, with justice, be attributed to the ancient gods. In a word, the Apology of this ecclesiastic was a chronicle of miseries and troubles.

The history became at once popular, and was copied and translated in every Christian country and in every language of Christian folk. It remained the only accessible and compendious history of the world for many centuries. When Alfred considered the ignorance of his people it is not wonderful that he turned his attention to Orosius and to a book which, more than any other of those recommended to him by his advisers, seemed fit for his purpose. He therefore undertook to translate it into the vulgar tongue. In the preface we find the following brief account of Alfred's work. The words seem to be Alfred's own.

"King Alfred was the interpreter of this book, and turned it from book Latin into English, as it is now done. Now he set forth word by word, now sense by sense, as clearly and as intelligently as he was able, in the midst of the various and worldly cares that oft troubled him both

in mind and in body. These cares are very hard for us to reckon, that in his days came upon the kingdoms to which he had succeeded, and yet when he had studied this book and turned it from Latin into English prose, he wrought it up once more into verse, as it is now done. And now he prayeth, and in God's name beseecheth, every man that careth to read this book, to pray for him, and not to blame him if he understand it more rightly than he (Alfred) could. *For every man must, according to the measure of his understanding and leisure, speak what he speaketh and do what he doeth.*"

A comparison of the Latin text with Alfred's version shows that it was not undertaken in a slavish spirit. One can see Asser reading the original and translating it clause by clause, while Alfred interrupts with his own notes, changing the words and making additions for his own observations. To compare the original with the version is like obtaining a series of glimpses into Alfred's mind, just as in a railway-train one snatches glimpses of the scenery as the train rushes on.

The question arises how far the work was read by the people for whom it was intended, namely, the better class—the gentry and the scholars first, and the common people afterwards. Assuredly the book was not read by the common sort, because they could not read. How far it was copied for the thanes and their class we have no means of judging. It would seem, however, that in the halls of the thanes, as in the monasteries, the reading aloud of books in the vernacular was part of the occupation of the winter evenings. Alfred, we may be quite sure, knew perfectly well how to get at his people. He would not waste his time in making translations if no one was to read them.

I need not speak further of the history of the world as related by Orosius. It is, however, introduced by a chapter on geography as it was known in the time of Orosius. This document, valuable to the historical student of geography, is enriched in Alfred's version by the introduction of the voyage of Oth-here and of Wulfstan, as related to Alfred. These voyages, which are chiefly connected with the Baltic, Alfred rightly judged to be of interest and instruction to his own people. The account is placed in the midst of the chapter on geography, where Orosius begins to speak of the Northmen, and is introduced with no other comment than the words, "Oth-here told his Lord, King Alfred, etc."

The voyage reads exactly like one of those in which the early explorers described their discoveries along the coast of North America.

"He said that he dwelt in the land to the northward along the West Sea; he said, however, that that land is very long north from thence, but it is all waste, except in a few places, where the Fins here and there dwell, for hunting in the winter, and in the summer for fishing in that sea. He said that he was desirous to try, once on a time, how far that country extended due north, or whether any one lived to the north of the waste. He then went due north along the country, leaving all the way the waste land on the right and the wide sea on the left, for three days; he was as far north as the whale-hunters go at the farthest. Then he proceeded in his course due north as far as he could sail within another three days; then the land there inclined due east, or the sea into the land, he knew not which, but he knew that he there waited for a west wind, or a little north, and sailed thence eastward along that land as far as he could sail in four days; then he had to wait for a due north wind, because the land

there inclined due south, or the sea in on that land, he knew not which; he then sailed thence along the coast due south, as far as he could sail in five days. There lay a great river, up in that land; they then turned up in that river, because they durst not sail on by that river, on account of hostility, because all that country was inhabited on the other side of that river. He had not before met with any land that was inhabited since he came from his own home; but all the way he had waste land on his right except fishermen, fowlers, and hunters, all of whom were Fins, and he had constantly a wide sea to the left."

Oth-here's home has been placed on the shores of Lerivik Sound, between the island of Senjen and the mainland, north of the Lofoden Islands. The voyage was along the northern coast of Norway, having on his left the Arctic Sea. He doubled the North Cape, and reached the White Sea. He also described to Alfred another voyage which he made south through the Cattegat among the Danish islands "Æt Hæthum, where the Angles lived before they came to England."

The voyage of Wulfstan is in the Baltic, and describes the country known afterwards as Eastland. He also mentions the port called "Æt Hæthum." It means "at the heaths," and is identified with the small port now called Haddeby, which is an ancient town of Sleswig (see Bowker's "Alfred," p. 167). Sir Clements Markham says that this ancient port of Sleswig is now a pretty little village, with a very venerable granite church on the banks of the river Schley, just opposite the more recent town of Sleswig.

The version of Orosius was accompanied by other works. The next that must be noticed is

the "Consolation of Philosophy," by Boethius. This is one of the few books which have been able to appeal to the hearts of its readers for many centuries. Anicius Manlius Torquatus Severinus Boethius (A.D. 470–524) was a rich and learned Roman of good family, skilled in all the sciences of his time, a student of mathemathics, a maker of mathematical instruments, a counsellor of King Theodoric, ambassador, Regulator of the Imperial Mint, and, unfortunately for himself, a reformer of abuses. The court and the land were full of abuses. The imperial officers in the provinces committed all kinds of tyrannies. Boethius attacked them, and defended the people; he created a host of enemies. The emperor grew old and melancholy, and inclined to listen to accusations against his old servants. Boethius was arrested and imprisoned as a traitor and a magician. In his prison he wrote his great work on the "Consolation of Philosophy. It is a work of prose and verse alternating. The time in which he lived was a period of universal decay and corruption. The old civilization was crumbling to pieces; the old religion had no longer any believers; there is nothing to show that Boethius had accepted Christianity, and nothing to show that he had any longer faith in the old gods. Rome and the glory of Rome were gone. Alaric, Attila, Odoacer, had destroyed the prestige and the invincibility of Rome. The Consolation which Philosophy brought to Boethius was that of resignation and of hope. The influence of this remarkable work, for a thousand years at least, was extraordinary. Alfred's version of the ninth century appears to have been the earliest trans-

lation. There was a German translation in the eleventh century, and a French in the year 1300.

The version of Alfred is like his Orosius, a free handling of the original. It is interspersed with his own thoughts and opinions; it is the exception, according to his latest editor, to find even a few lines translated word for word. I have already quoted a passage of this work in which the king speaks, and not Boethius.

The Pope, Gregory I., called Gregory the Great, was born about 540, and died in 609, after a Papacy of no more than thirteen years, in which he made a lasting mark upon the history of the Latin Church. Among his numerous works are two which arrived at a greater influence than any of the others. First was the "Cura Pastoralis," a treatise on the duty of a bishop. This book Alfred set himself to translate. There was a special reason for honouring the name of Gregory, by whose exertions the country had been recovered to Christendom. In the book called the "Cura Pastoralis" Gregory—

"collected together many passages that were scattered in various parts of his writings. He endeavoured also to point out in what spirit and manner the spiritual shepherd should enter upon his office, how he ought to conduct himself therein, how he should vary his mode of preaching, so as to suit the different circumstances of his hearers, and how he must guard himself from self-exaltation at the happy result of his labours. In the following centuries this book had a decided influence in awakening a better spirit among the clergy, and in causing efforts to be made to improve the condition of the Church. The reforming synods under Charlemagne made it a standard for their proceedings with respect to the amendment of ecclesiastical affairs."

The "Dialogues," so called because the book takes the form of conversations between the author and his confidential friend, Peter the Deacon, were probably translated by Bishop Werfrith of Worcester, at Alfred's instigation.

I have already quoted Alfred's introduction to this work and his letter to the bishops. In a second preface Alfred writes a short account of the work in verse, which Professor Earle thus renders—

"This epistle Augustine
over salt sea brought from the south
to us island-dwellers just as it erst
indited had been by Christ's doughty soldier
t. Roman pontiff. Much right discourse
did Gregory of glowing wit give forth apace
with skilful soul, a hoard of studious thought.
He of mankind converted the most
to the Ruler of heaven; he of Romans the best,
of men the most learned and widest admired.

At length into English, Alfred the King
w nded my every word; and me to his writers
south and north sent out; more copies of such
he bade them bring back, that he to his bishops
might send, for some of them needed it,
those who with Latin speech had least acquaintance."

In the preface to the "Dialogues" Alfred simply claims the version as his own.

Bede, called the Venerable, was born in the year 673 at Wearmouth, near the mouth of the Tyne. He was placed in a monastery at the age of seven, and there continued during the whole of his life. It is remarkable that this illustrious scholar acquired the whole of his learning from the library of his northern monastery, far remote from the seats of learning in Italy and southern

France. He taught himself by assiduous labour in his cell from the books that were accessible to him; the fact shows that the libraries in the Northumbrian monasteries were at least respectable, according to the requirements of the time, and that these houses, before their destruction by the Danes, might become, and did become, for those who were inclined for study, the homes of learning and scholarship. Bede's most important work was his "Ecclesiastical History," which is the history of the Church in England to his own time. It is evident that in translating this work Alfred's intention was to give his people such a knowledge of the past history of the Church as would confirm in their minds that clinging to things venerable and of antiquity which belongs to the Teutonic mind. Here they could learn for themselves how Christianity displaced the ancient paganism; by what means it was propagated; the story of the martyrs, confessors, and saints; something of what it had done for themselves, and something of the condition of the Christian world in England before the invasion by the Danes. It is something, even for us, to understand the necessity for making such a work popular. The book, moreover, is not simply an ecclesiastical history; it introduces many temporal subjects, and contains much information on the settlement and partition of England. Alfred in his version omits many parts as not likely to be of interest to his people. Thus he omits the account of the relation between the Church of York and the State, while he includes all that is said of the Kingdom of Wessex. Doubt has been thrown upon this version as Alfred's work, but it is referred to as such only a hundred years after his death.

The book called the "Blooms" is remarkable from many points of view; it contains not only an adaptation of St. Augustine's "Soliloquies" and his Epistle to Paulina in the "Vision of God," but many extracts from Augustine's "City of God," from Gregory and from Jerome, with passages which appear to be comments of the king himself. Now there is a passage in Asser, where the biographer speaks of a manual compiled at the king's desire.

"On a certain day we were both of us sitting in the king's chamber, talking on all kinds of subjects, as usual, and it happened that I read to him a quotation out of a certain book. He heard it attentively with both ears, and addressed me with a thoughtful mind, showing me at the same moment a book which he carried in his bosom, wherein the daily courses and psalms and prayers which he had read in his youth were written, and he commanded me to write the same quotation in that book. Hearing this, and perceiving his ingenuous benevolence and devout desire of studying the words of Divine wisdom, I gave, though in secret, boundless thanks to Almighty God, who had implanted such a love of wisdom in the king's heart. But I could not find any empty space in that book wherein to write the quotation, for it was already full of various matters; wherefore, I made a little delay, principally that I might stir up the bright intellect of the king to a higher acquaintance with the Divine testimonies. Upon his urging me to make haste and write it quickly, I said to him, 'Are you willing that I should write that quotation on some leaf apart? For it is not certain whether we shall not find one or more other such extracts which will please you; and if that should so happen, we shall be glad that we have kept them apart.' 'Your plan is good,' said he, and I gladly made haste to get ready a sheet, in the beginning of which I wrote what he bade me; and on that same day I wrote therein, as I had anticipated, no less than three other quotations which pleased him; and from that time we daily talked together, and found out other quo-

tations which pleased him, so that the sheet became full, and deservedly so; according as it is written. "The just man builds upon a moderate foundation, and by degrees passes to greater things." Thus, like a most productive bee, he flew here and there, asking questions as he went, until he had eagerly and unceasingly collected many various flowers of Divine Scriptures, with which he quickly stored the cells of his mind.

"Now, when the first quotation was copied, he was eager at once to read it, and to interpret in Saxon, and then to teach others; even as read of that happy robber, who recognized his Lord—aye, the Lord of all men—as He was hanging on the blessed Cross, and saluting Him with his bodily eyes only, because elsewhere he was all pierced with nails, cried, 'Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom!' for it is only at the end of his life that he began to learn the rudiments of the Christian faith. But the king, inspired by God, began to study the rudiments of Divine Scripture on the sacred solemnity of St. Martin (Nov. 11), and he continued to learn the flowers collected by [illegible] masters, and to reduce them into the form of one [illegible] as he was then able, although mixed one with another, until it became almost as large as a psalter. This book he called his 'Enchiridion,' or 'Manual,' because he carefully kept it at hand day and night, and found, as he told me, no small consolation therein."

Is the book of "Blooms" this manual? It seems quite possible, and even probable. I repeat the suggestion because it is one which may profitably be followed up. If it is the truth, then we have not only the king's favourite passages from the authors whom he studied—to know this is to know the mind of the man—but also the observations and remarks which he makes upon them.

In the preface to this book Alfred describes himself as in a wood full of comely trees.

"In every tree I saw something which I needed at home, therefore I advise every one who is able, and has many wains, that he trade to the same wood where I cut the stud-shafts, and there fetch more for himself, and load his wain with fair rods, that he may wind many a neat wall, and set many a comely house, and build many a fair town of them; and thereby may dwell merrily and softly so as now I have not yet done. But He who taught me, to whom the wood belonged, (?) may He make me to dwell more softly in this temporary cot, the while I am in this world, and also in the everlasting home which He has promised us through St. Austin, St. Gregory, and St. Jerome, and through many other holy Fathers; as I believe, also, for the merits of all these, He will make the way more plain than it was before, and especially enlighten the eyes of my mind, so that I may search out the right way to the everlasting glory and the everlasting rest which is promised us through those holy Fathers. May it be so!

"It is no wonder though men sink in timber-working, and in the carrying and building; but every man wishes, after he has built a *cottage on his lord's lease* by his help, that he may sometimes rest him therein, and hunt, and fowl, and fish, and use in every way under the lease, both on water and on land, until that he earn bookland and everlasting heritage through his lord's mercy.

"So do the Wealthy Giver who wields both these temporary cottages and the eternal homes! May He who shaped both, and wields both, grant me that I be meet for each, both here to be profitable and thither to come!"

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle certainly owed more than mere encouragement to the king. The very words of Alfred are, it is claimed, to be found in that part which concerns the wars. It is historically certain that Plegmund carried on the Chronicle, perhaps also he began it. As is well known, it is the principal authority—in many cases the sole authority—for the events de-

scribed. If we were deprived of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle there would be great gaps in our history quite impossible to be filled up.

In the course of time many other works were attributed to Alfred. Some of these were really his. Such is the king's "Book of Martyrs." There were also attributed to him a collection of Proverbs, a version of Æsop, a treatise on Falconry, and many other things. We have, however, quite enough of Alfred's genuine remains without adding doubtful or apocryphal works. They show a mind always active, always at work for the advancement of his people. His four principal works are deliberately designed each to fill its own place and to perform its own duty. The Bishop of Bristol sums up the four divisions.

"For general history, and for history and geography relating to their own race on the Continent of Europe, he chose Orosius; for mental study, the 'Consolation' of Boethius; for realization of the true principles of the life and work of religion, the 'Pastoral Care;' for the Church history of the English people, of course the great and priceless book of the Venerable Bede."

Let me on this subject quote the words of Mr. Frederick Harrison (Bowker's "Alfred"):—

"It is in his own writings that we come to love Alfred best. No ruler of men has left us so pellucid a revelation of his own soul. As in 'Meditations' of Aurelius and the Psalms of David, there is given to men the outpourings of his aspirations and his sorrows. Neither Richelieu, Cromwell, nor William the Silent ever recorded more frankly their problems and their aims. In the authentic writings of Alfred we are in the presence of one who is a teacher as much as a king, who recalls to us Augustine and À Kempis, or Bunyan and Jeremy Taylor. His Boethius served him as texts whereon he preached to

his people profound sermons on the moral and spiritual life. Read his homily on Riches—'that it is better to give than to receive;' on the true Ruler—'that power is never good, unless he be good that has it;' on the uses of Adversity—'no wise man should desire a soft life.' Few men ever had so hard a life—with his mysterious and cruel malady, 'his thorn in the flesh,' until his early death; with his distracted and ruined kingdom, his ferocious enemies, his never-ending cares. And amidst it all we have the king in his silent study pouring out poetic thought upon married love or friendship; on true happiness or the inner life; composing pastoral poetry or casting into English old idylls from Greek epic or myth; ending with some magnificent *Te Deum* of his own composition. . . .

"Alfred did more than contribute translations to the literature of his country; he laid the very foundations of our literature, the most noble literature that the world has ever seen. He collected and preserved the poetry based on the traditions and legends brought from the German forests. He himself delighted to hear and to repeat these legends and traditions: the deeds of the mighty warriors who fought with monsters, dragons, wild boars, and huge serpents. He made his children learn their songs; he had them sung in his court. The tradition goes that he could himself sing them to the music of his own harp. This wild and spontaneous poetry which Alfred preserved is the beginning of our own noble choir of poets. In other words, the foundation of that stately Palace of Literature, built up by our poets and writers for the admiration and instruction and consolation of mankind, was laid by Alfred. Well, but he did more than collect the poetry, he began the prose. Before Alfred there was no Anglo-Saxon prose.

CHAPTER VIII.

SUMMARY OF THE REIGN.

We have considered Alfred as a warrior, and captain, Alfred as the restorer of religion, Alfred as the law-giver, Alfred as the encourager of education, Alfred as writer. A few points remain to be considered.

Returning once more to Asser. He says—

"In the mean time the king, during the frequent wars and other trammels of this present life, the invasions of the pagans, and his own daily infirmities of body, continued to carry on the government, and to exercise hunting in all its branches; to teach his workers in gold and artificers of all kinds, his falconers, his hawkers, and dog-keepers; to build houses, majestic and good, beyond all the precedents of his ancestors, by his new mechanical inventions; to recite the Saxon books, and especially to learn by heart the Saxon poems, and to make others learn them; and he alone never desisted from studying, most diligently, to the best of his ability."

It would seem as if hunting was introduced here in a place of needless prominence. Let it be remembered, however, that hunting was more than a sport. Men did not go out with horse and hound in order to ride after a fox; they went out to fight big game—wild boar, wolves, wild cattle; they went out to provide food. Hunting was necessary. The fisher folk went after the fish in the sea and in the rivers. The fowler trapped the myriad wild birds of the fen and marsh. The nobler game, the wild deer, was hunted by king and nobles; while the ladies of the court went out with falcon on wrist to bring

down heron and wild swan, small birds and great birds of the woods. Hunting, the trade of the savage, became the sport of kings. It was regulated by a complicated system of rules and customs. Not to know this unwritten code was to be uneducated and ill-bred; while the servants themselves were instructed in the whole art of the chase for the conservation of their herds and the maintenance of the royal sport. Thus we find Alfred, as stated above, instructing his falconers, hawkers, and dog-keepers.

He also encouraged the work of the craftsmen, goldsmiths, and jewellers. In these arts the Saxons greatly excelled. A single instance of the work of his goldsmiths, King Alfred's jewel, is a monument of the level attained under the trying conditions of war and defeat, in which the artist had to work. This jewel was found near Athelney in the year 1693. It is now preserved at Oxford, beside another jewel of the same period. Pauli describes the jewel as—

"a polished crystal of an oval form, rather more than two inches in length and half an inch thick, inlaid with a mosaic enamel of green and yellow. This enamel represents the outline of a human figure, which appears to be in a sitting posture, holding in each hand a sort of lily-branch in blossom. This figure may be meant to represent St. Cuthbert, or even Christ, or it may be simply a king in state attire. The reverse side of the jewel is covered by a plate of fine gold, on which, somewhat tastefully and fancifully, a flower is engraved. The oval sides are bordered by beaten gold, admirably and durably manufactured, bearing around them the words:

'AELFRED MEC HEHT GEWYRCAN'

('Alfred ordered me to be made').

"The letters of this inscription are all capitals, and in their somewhat stiff form agree entirely with the initial letters in the principal parts of the authentic manuscripts of Alfred's time. Still more than the letters, the form of the two middle words, by their spelling, bears witness to

KING ALFRED'S JEWEL.

the age claimed by the motto. At the extreme end, where the crystal and its border join the gold, it is finished by a beautifully worked dolphin's head in gold, whose empty eye-sockets must have once contained precious stones, and from whose open jaws a small golden pin protrudes. This probably served as a fastening to a cane, or some ornamental staff, on the point of which the jewel was placed. It may, indeed, have been a part of the king's sceptre."

As a specimen of women's work in gold of nearly the same time may be taken the stole,

woven with gold wire beaten flat, like narrow tape, preserved in the Chapter Library of Durham. It was worked by Saxon ladies, and given to St. Cuthbert's tomb by Athelstan in 934.

In architecture Asser speaks of royal halls and vills of stone; but nothing remains which can be assigned to Alfred himself. He repaired the walls of London, but where are they now? He built St. Paul's, but that building was destroyed by fire. It was probably Alfred who changed the position of the London gates, and ran new streets across the old and ruined sites; but where are the gates, and who would recognize the Cheapside of to-day with the Chepe of a thousand years ago? Of Saxon churches there are a few scattered about the country; but, again, not one which we can ascribe to Alfred. There is the ancient Church of St. Lawrence, Bradford-on-Avon, which may be as early as the ninth century. There is Deerhurst, near Tewkesbury, built in 1053, two hundred years after Alfred. At Wing near Aylesbury, at Colchester, at Cambridge, at Limpsfield, at Earl's Barton, at Oxford, there are parts still standing of the old Saxon churches. I should say that the little church at Bradford-on-Avon may be taken as a good specimen of the Saxon parish church. It is cruciform, it is lighted by small and narrow windows, which were not glazed, there was no pavement, the arch connecting nave and chancel is a narrow doorway, the ornamentation is rude. It is a stone church, which proves that it was built by some wealthy person, perhaps by Aldhelm himself, when he founded the nunnery at Bradford—this would bring us to the beginning of the seventh century. It is a very small church; but then the village or parish for

which it was built was also very small. Probably the church was quite large enough for the congregation.

Another typical Saxon church may be that of Greenstead, also a very small church, originally. The nave is built of trunks of trees cut straight through the middle, the round part left outside. In the restoration of the parish churches we may be quite sure that the first object was the possession of a church, its decoration and materia being quite a secondary consideration. Alfred, therefore, was a great architect and builder. It is the temptation of kings to build. Which would one prefer to be, the king of whom nothing but the name remains attached to his huge pyramid, or the king whose pyramid has vanished, while his name, and his history, and his achievements are deathless? Alfred's pyramid has vanished.

Alfred was a musician. Every educated youth was a musician, and could play, while some could sing. According to tradition Alfred could sing as well as play.

We may picture for ourselves the royal hall in which the Saxon poems were sung or recited. It is a long hall—say 200 feet by 40 feet—with a high roof and curved gables. There is a door at each end, with a porch enlarged at one end so as to form pantry, buttery, kitchen, and larder. Below these offices is the cellar. Wright reproduces a picture representing the cellar, with servants who draw the ale or mead, and carry it up the ladder which serves for a stair. The hall consists of a spacious nave, in which a double row of pillars supports the high roof, having a narrow aisle on either side. Down the middle of the floor runs

the stone hearth, on which blaze the fires of wood. At the upper end is a cross-bench, where the king or the chief sits. With him are his wife, who fills the cups, and the thanes. On each side of the long hearth runs a line of tables with benches and stools, where sit the chief's "hearth-sharers." At the lower end is a table with cups. Between the rows of pillars and the walls are sleeping-places for the ladies and the women. Tapestry and hangings separated this space from the hall; and in the hall the gleeman sat, harp in hand, singing or chanting, while his fingers ran up and down the strings of the harp, the alliterative poems of the time. When one hears the impromptu singing of the Welsh while the harp plays one of the familiar Welsh tunes, the singer always in harmony with the air, it is the ancient gleeman who sings to the accompaniment of the ancient harp.

Or the gleeman played, as the man with the drum and the Pandean pipes now plays, while the juggler tossed the balls and caught the knives,—tricks as old as balls and knives themselves; or the tumblers and posturers threw themselves into strange contortions, and the dancing-girl danced upon her head. The dancing-girl of the East was not introduced until five hundred years later, when she came over from Syria with Richard, Earl of Cornwall. Perhaps there were still maintained the old games of strength, while the gleeman played. The Danish game of bone-throwing was never a pastime of the English. Or they asked riddles in verse, the answers of which everybody knew; yet they were asked over and over again, for the folk were still a simple folk, pleased with a repetition of the old jingle, and with their

own cleverness in guessing again what everybody knew already.

They sang the wild songs of Beowulf, "Cædmon's Poems of the Creation," the "Traveller's Song," the "Lament of Deor," Amywulf's "Elme," and his "Vision of the Holy Rood," and all the poetry of the early Saxon period; they told fables; they delivered moral axioms; they taught all kinds of knowledge by question and answer, not catechizing the people, but singing to them; they related legends and lives of the saints; they quoted pithy sayings and proverbs, as, for example, the following:—

"Virtue is a great spell against demons. The reins of the tongue are fastened in the heart. Eyes are of no use to the blindly minded. Happy he who learns by the whipping got by another. Keep your new friend and your wine until they are old. Enslave your mind to no malignant luxuries. The much talker strips his mind of its real merits. If you would be great, be moderate."

There were materials in plenty for the winter evenings, when the cups went round freely and more than freely among those seasoned heads, and round the fires lay the people listening to the gleeman, carried out of themselves by the music and the song.

The coins of a period may also be used in estimating the art of the time. There is no difficulty in examining them, for a great many coins of Alfred are extant, and may be studied in the museums. It is to be observed that the coinage, then and long after, was entrusted to functionaries called moneyers, who had license and power to strike coins at certain towns only. This practice was continued by the Norman kings. The story

of the terrible punishment inflicted on his moneyers by Henry I. for issuing debased coins is an illustration of the practice and the dangers; for who could prevent the production of debased money when the "moneyer" made his profit out of the issue, and there was no place of assay? It is not stated anywhere to my knowledge how the mints were supplied with silver; when the existing coinage was all called in it was so much worn and clipped as to be worth little, while it was too frequently made of base metal, and worth nothing.

There was more than one reason for setting up the mints in various places. The mint was, to

PENNY OF ALFRED THE GREAT.

begin with, a sign of authority; where Alfred's money was made, there Alfred's authority prevailed. Again, the difficulties of internal communication were so great—in the winter it was well-nigh impossible to convey any kind of goods, merchandise, wares, or stores, from one place to another—that it was necessary to set up a mint in every important centre. When the coinage had become scarce, debased, or clipped in one district—these things were always happening with the coinage—it was desirable to replace it by another impression as speedily as possible.

If there had been but one central mint, how could the coinage be supplied within a reasonable time, say, from London to the North? It was, therefore, convenient to have mints in various parts of the country. If we examined into the matter more curiously I think it would be found that there was a direct connection between the situation of the mint and the population and trade of the place. This point I must, however, leave for others to investigate. It is sufficient here to state that King Alfred set up the Royal Mint at London, Bath, Canterbury, Winchester, Exeter, Gloucester, Oxford, and Lincoln—perhaps also in places further north. Alfred's coins do not show any marked advance on those of his predecessors, but if we remember the conditions under which the moneyer had to work, the wreck of art and the dispersion of craftsmen, the result certainly illustrates the aptitude of the Saxon for this kind of art. It was, we know, the occupation of Dunstan, when an anchorite in his monastery, to work in gold and silver.

It was, however, in the illustration and illumination of books that the artistic skill of the people was chiefly shown. No country in Western Europe could produce books more beautiful, with finer writing or with finer pictures, than the copyists and illustrators of Alfred's reign. In the words of Mr. Loftie (Bowker's "Alfred," p. 256), "the mechanical part of the work alone shows the high standard of the art. In the time of Alfred artists could command the help of artificers who knew how to make vellum fit for the most delicate painting and writing; colours were produced worthy of the vellum for which they were prepared; gold-beating and gilding with the leaf

had been carried to perfection never since surpassed."

About fifty years after Alfred's death a book called the "Benedictional" was written for Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester, which has been considered to mark the highest level of Anglo-Saxon art. The antiquary Ottley thus speaks of it:—

"You desire from me a few words on the illuminations in St. Æthelwold's 'Benedictionary,' with my opinion of their merits as works of art. I feel honoured by the request, and comply with it the more willingly, as I can honestly say that I think them in the highest degree creditable to the taste and intelligence of this nation at a period when in most parts of Europe the fine arts are commonly believed to have been at a very low ebb."

One more aspect of Alfred's foresight. He endeavoured to remove the separation of his island from the rest of the world—a separation which has been of the greatest possible advantage on the whole, which has saved our country from those wars, invasions, and occupations which from time to time have devastated France, Germany, Spain, and Italy. Yet the separation had its dangers, and these very great and real. These dangers are obvious; they are summed up in a word—insularity. When our Continental critics and our American cousins have nothing else to reproach us with, they call us insulars. We may understand by this a conservatism born of ignorance: prejudices which mean a blind pride in our own institutions; the contempt of foreigners; the slow reception of new ideas; the disinclination to change our habits. There was a time—not long since—when this reproach could be very justly brought against us. We have been ignorant, blind, and prejudiced; until recently

we mobbed the peaceful foreigner in the street, and affected to despise the foreigner in war. We were the only land of freedom—with the House of Commons filled with younger sons and placemen; we were the only land of justice—with packed juries and judges who were creatures of the Court; we were the land of religious liberty—with exclusion from every office and every profession of Catholic, Nonconformist, and Jew; we supposed ourselves the envy of the whole world, while we hanged women and children for trifles, flogged soldiers and sailors to death, and imprisoned thousands because they could not pay a debt of a few shillings. What insularity meant may be learned from the annals of the eighteenth century. Perhaps Alfred did not foresee all these things, but he did foresee the evils of separation from the families of Christendom; and he did undoubtedly foresee the evils of ignorance and stupid prejudice. The barrier which they would erect, the great wall they would put up round his kingdom, the wall beyond which all was surmise, legend, report, terror, and even contempt; the barrier which would stop the merchant and the traveller, which would make foreign trade and enlightenment and enterprise impossible, he did all he could to break down and to destroy.

With this view he encouraged divines, scholars, and men of learning to come over; he gave them entertainment at his court; he conferred posts of dignity and honour upon them; he raised them to be bishops and abbots; he consulted with them, and made them his personal friends; he introduced craftsmen of all kinds to revive the arts which had been lost in the long wars, particularly those arts in which his people had for-

merly excelled, and would again excel—the gold and silver work, the fine embroidery, the illumination of books, the writing of books, an art in itself; so clear, so fine, so beautiful was the English writing. He created commercial relations with foreign countries; he revived and restored the trade of his neglected and desolated ports—these were the ports of London, Dover, and Southampton. As regards London, the City had been once before left desolate; on that occasion the foreign merchants found it again when the wave of war had passed over, and the place, although empty, was once more safe. Alfred did not wait for the merchants to find out that order was restored; as soon as the walls were repaired, with the bridge and the quays, he sent messages inviting the return of trade. Thus, in a double sense rebuilt and restored London, of which he must be regarded as the Founder, since the earlier City had wholly disappeared. It was, one supposes, for the purpose of creating commercial friendships that he gave his daughter in marriage, not to one of his own thanes, but to a foreign prince, Baldwin, the son of Judith, once his stepmother. He raised to the order of gentlehood every merchant who had made three voyages to the Mediterranean in person and at his own expense; he sent embassies abroad, to Rome, to France, to the East; he received letters and presents from the Patriarch of Jerusalem; he actually sent an embassy to India itself, to lay presents upon the tombs of St. Thomas and St. Bartholomew. This, to my mind, is a story so marvellous that it seems almost incredible. Yet its very difficulties—the distance, the journey thither, beyond the reach of Christian monas-

teries and the power of Christian Rome, help to make it more credible. If Alfred had known how far it was to India, how dangerous and long and difficult was the journey, how fanatical were some of the people on the way, he would have hesitated before sending his ambassadors thither. On the other hand, he had heard of Charlemagne's embassies to the Caliph of Bagdad, and he desired, perhaps, to show that what the great Emperor had done he, the king of a kingdom small and obscure, but with ambitions, could also emulate. Above all, he awakened in the somewhat sluggish minds of his people the imagination and the spirit of curiosity and adventure which were necessary for the part which England would be called upon to play. And this, we may reasonably suppose, was what he most desired to e[illegible]t.

We have come to the en[illegible] Alfred's life and reign. You have seen him fighting as a boy and man almost continuously for thirty years and more, nearly the whole of his active life; you have seen his kingdom overrun, his people murdered, his land devastated, his churches and schools swept away; you have seen religion, liberty, learning, the arts all destroyed; every thing, as he says, "despoiled by the heathen." Only one thing remained to the unfortunate country, the tenacity, the courage, the faith of the king. You have seen how he triumphed over his enemies; how he laid the foundations in everything of the England that was [illegible] grow out of his little kingdom of Wessex. Do not call him the creator or the founder of anything; he *renewed the foundations;* he made the growth and development of England possible; he gave us our fleet, our army, our institutions, our religion,

our arts, and our trade. Not that he invented, created, or founded these things; his brother had a fleet, there were English armies before his time, there was a code of laws before his own, there was a foreign trade, there were arts before Alfred lived. But everything had been destroyed; and Alfred, in restoring and rebuilding, *renewed the foundations*, and made things stable which before were unstable; placed on the solid rock of religion what had previously rested on the shifting sands of tradition.

Historians have exhausted themselves in praise of the character, the personal force, of Alfred. His secret was the entire absence of personal ambition or aggrandisement; he worked for his people, and in working for them and for them alone, he established his own name and fame for as long as the English name shall last.

Let me give, in his own words, his own conception of what a king should be—

"Power is never a good, unless he be good that has it; so it is the good of the man, not of the power. If power be goodness, therefore is it that no man by his dominion can come to the virtues, and to merit; but by his virtues and merit he comes to dominion and power. Thus no man is better for his power; but if he be good, it is from his virtues that he is good. From his virtues he becomes worthy of power, if he be worthy of it. . . . By wisdom you may come to power, though you should not desire the power. You need not be solicitous about power, nor strive after it. If you be wise and good, it will follow you though you should not wish. . . .

"Ah! Wise One, thou knowest that greed and the possession of this earthly power never were pleasing to me, nor did I ever greatly desire this earthly kingdom—save that I desired tools and materials to do the work that it was commanded me to do. This was that I might

guide and wield wisely the authority committed to me. Why, thou knowest, that no man may understand any craft or wield any power unless he have tools and materials. Every craft has its proper tools. But the tools that a king needs to rule are these: to have his land fully peopled; to have priestmen, and soldiermen, and workmen. Yea, thou knowest that without these tools no king can put forth his capacity to rule. . . . It was for this I desired materials to govern with, that my ability to rule might not be forgotten and hidden away. For every faculty and authority is apt to grow obsolete and ignored, if it be without wisdom; and that which is done in unwisdom can never be reckoned as skill. *This will I say —that I have sought to live worthily the while I lived, and after my life to leave to the men that come after me a remembering of me in good works.* . . .

"Ah! my soul, one evil is stoutly to be shunned. It is that which most constantly and grievously deceives all those who have a nature of distinction, but who have not attained to full command of their powers. This is the desire of false glory and of unrighteous power, and of immoderate fame of good deeds above all other people. For many men desire power that they may have fame, though they be unworthy, for even the most depraved desire it also. But he that will investigate this fame wisely and earnestly will perceive how little it is, how precarious, how frail, how bereft it is of all that is good.

"Glory of this world! Why do foolish men with a false voice call thee glory? Thou art not so. More men have pomp and glory and worship from the opinion of foolish people than they have from their own works.

"They say a certain king cried: he had a naked sword hanging over his head by a small thread, ready at a moment to cut short his life. It was so always to me. . . ."

Among all who have written of Alfred, and written worthily and eloquently, there is no tribute so entirely satisfactory in its expression as that of Freeman:—

"Alfred . . . is the most perfect character in history. He is a singular instance of a prince who has become a hero of romance, who, as a hero of romance, has had countless imaginary exploits and imaginary institutions attributed to him, but to whose character romance has done no more than justice, and who appears in exactly the same light in history and in fable. No other man on record has ever so thoroughly united all the virtues both of the ruler and of the private man. In no other man on record were so many virtues disfigured by so little alloy. A saint without superstition, a scholar without ostentation, a warrior all whose wars were fought in the defence of his country, a conqueror whose laurels were never stained by cruelty, a prince never cast down by adversity, lifted up to insolence in the hour of triumph; there is no other name in history to compare with his. St. Lewis comes nearest to him in the union of a more than monastic piety with the highest civil, military, and domestic virtues. Alfred and Lewis alike stand forth in honourable contrast to the abject superstition of some other royal saints who were so selfishly engaged in the care of their own souls that they refused to either raise up heirs to their throne, or to strike a blow on behalf of their people. But even in St. Lewis we see a disposition to forsake an immediate sphere of duty for the sake of distant and unprofitable, however pious and glorious, undertakings. The true duties of a king of the French clearly lay in France, and not in Egypt or at Tunis. No such charge lies at the door of the great king of the West Saxons. With an inquiring spirit which took in the whole world, for purposes alike of scientific inquiry and of Christian benevolence, Alfred never forgot that his first duty was to his own people. He forestalled our own age in exploring the Northern Ocean, and in sending alms to the distant churches of India; but he neither forsook his crown, like some of his predecessors, nor neglected his duties, like some of his successors. The virtue of Alfred, like the virtue of Washington, consisted in no marvellous displays of superhuman genius, but in the simple straightforward discharge of the duty of the moment. But Washington, soldier, statesman, and patriot, like Alfred, has no claim

to Alfred's character of scholar and master of scholars. William the Silent, like Alfred the deliverer of his people, had no call to be also their literary teacher; and in his career, glorious as it is, there is an element of intrigue which is quite unlike the noble simplicity of both Alfred and Washington. The same union of zeal for religion and learning, with the highest gifts of the warrior and the statesman, is found on a wider field of action in Charles the Great. But even Charles cannot aspire to the pure glory of Alfred. Amidst all the splendours of conquest and legislation, we cannot be blind to an alloy of personal ambition and personal vice, to occasional unjust aggressions and occasional acts of cruelty. Among our own later princes the great Edward alone can bear for a moment the comparison with his glorious ancestor. And, when tried by such a standard, even the great Edward fails. Even in him we do not see the same wonderful union of gifts and virtues which so seldom meet together: we cannot acquit Edward of occasional acts of violence, of occasional recklessness as to means; we cannot attribute to him the pure, simple, almost childlike disinterestedness which marks the character of Alfred. The times, indeed, were different; Edward had to tread the path of righteousness and honour in a time of far more tangled policy, and amidst temptations, not harder, indeed, but far more subtle. The legislative merits of Edward are greater than those of Alfred; but this is a difference in the times rather than in the men. The popular error which makes Alfred the personal author of all our institutions hardly needs a fresh confutation. Popular legends attribute to him the invention of trial by jury and of countless other portions of our law, the germs of which may be discerned ages before the time of Alfred, while their existing shapes cannot be discerned till ages after him. Alfred, like so many of our early kings, collected and codified the laws of his predecessors; but we have his own personal witness that he purposely abstained from any large amount of strictly new legislation. The legislation of Edward, on the other hand, in its boldness and originality, forms the most marked of all epochs in the history of our law. It is perhaps, after all, in his lit-

erary aspect that the distinctive beauty of Alfred's character shines forth most clearly. The mere patronage of learning was common to him with many princes of his age. Both Charles the Great and many of his successors had set brilliant examples in this way. What distinguished him was his own personal appearance as an author. Now, as a rule, literary kings have not been a class deserving of much honour. They have commonly stepped out of their natural sphere only to display the least honourable characteristics of another calling. But it was not so with the Emperor Marcus; it was not so with our Alfred. In Alfred there is no sign of literary pedantry, ostentation, or jealousy; nothing is done for his own glory; he writes, just as he fights and legislates, with a single eye to the good of his people. He shows no signs of original genius; he is simply an editor and translator, working honestly for the improvement of the subjects he loved. This is really a purer fame, and one more in harmony with the other features of Alfred's character than the highest achievements of the poet, the historian, or the philosopher. I repeat, then, that Alfred is the most perfect character in history. And he was specially happy in handing on a large share of his genius and his virtue to those who came after him. The West Saxon kings, for nearly a century, form one of the most brilliant royal lines on record. From the Saint to Edgar the Peaceful, the short and wretched reign of Eadwig is the only interruption to one continued display of valour under the guidance of wisdom. The greatness of dynasty, obscured under the second Ethelred, flashes forth for a moment in the short and glorious career of the second Eadmund. It then becomes more permanently eclipsed under the rule of Dane, Norman, and Angevin, till it shines forth once more in the first of the new race whom we can claim as English at heart, till, if not Alfred himself, at least his unconquered son, seems to rise again to life in one who at once bore his name and followed in his steps.

"It may be asked, what manner of man to look at was this great king? His biographer, Asser, who knew him well, has not thought fit to tell us. He only says in words

of flattery that Alfred was more comely and gracious of aspect than his brothers. These brothers, four in number, were all kings before him, and all died young. Alfred himself was afflicted by a disease which never left him. It is therefore presumable that there was some congenital weakness in them all. This was not physical weakness; whatever the disease, it did not interfere with Alfred's courage or his prowess in battle. This is proved by the fact that the Saxon kings actually fought in person in the forefront of the battle, and on foot. Alfred, for instance, fought in a dozen battles at least, and always with the valour that belongs to a strong man. I take him to have been a man of good stature and of strong build; a man whose appearance was kingly, who impressed his followers with the gallant and confident carriage of a brave soldier. But as to his face, or the colour of his hair or eyes, I can tell nothing. Fair hair he had, I think, and blue eyes, or the more common type of brown hair and grey eyes. When a king resigns all personal ambitions and seeks nothing for himself, it seems natural and fitting that, while his works live after him, he himself should vanish without leaving so much as a tradition of his face or figure."

CHAPTER IX.

DEATH OF THE KING.

I HAVE asked, without the hope of getting a reply, what was the nature of the disease from which Alfred suffered for thirty years or more. Whatever it was, it seems to have killed him at last. Alfred died at the age of fifty-three, on October 28, 901 (to accept the date generally given). It is to be regretted that no particulars of his death have come down to us. Considering, however, the apocryphal nature of most death-bed

scenes and the certainty that words would be put into the dying man's mouth which would be well meant but misleading, it is perhaps as well that nothing has been set down about his death. He died; we know no more; but we may be very certain that he died happily, with the full consciousness of having at least tried to do his duty. The most perfect of human figures must needs fall short of the Divine perfection; there were weaknesses of which we know nothing, perhaps things which lay upon the king's conscience; but, to outward seeming, as far as posterity can judge, the man was blameless.

They buried him in the Cathedral of Winchester. Round the chancel of that most venerable structure are still preserved the coffins of many kings of the House of Cerdic. But you may look in vain for that of Alfred. The body was removed two hundred years afterwards, by Henry I., and placed in the chapel of the house called Hyde Abbey, and there, somewhere among the ruins, still lies the dust of the great West Saxon king.

Pauli has gathered together all that is known of Alfred's domestic life. (His widowed consort, Elswyth, died in 905. Her husband Alfred had left her by will the manors of Wantage and Ethandune; the first because he was born there, the other because it was the place where he won the freedom of his country.

Alfred left several sons and daughters. Of the latter Ethelfleda, the eldest, married Ethelred, and became the "Lady of Mercia." She had a daughter, but her line ended with her.

Ethelgiva entered the religious life, and became Abbess of Shaftesbury; Elfrida, the third

daughter, married Baldwin II., Count of Flanders. I have already mentioned that through Elfrida our royal family is descended from Alfred. Among other estates presented to Elfrida by her father was that of Lewisham in Kent.

Alfred's sons were Edward, afterwards king, and Ethelwald, of whose children and their descendants nothing is known.

Alfred's will provides for all his children and his friends. Besides the estates bequeathed to the former, he gave his two sons £500 in money; to his consort Elswyth, and each of his three daughters, £100; to his ealdermen, 100 marks each; to his serving-men, £200 to be divided among them; to the Archbishop of Canterbury, 100 marks; to the Bishops of Hereford, Worcester and Sheborne, 100 marks each; for masses and services for his soul, £200. As regards the principles upon which he acted in drawing up his will, he states clearly:—

"I will that the persons who hold land follow the command in my father's will as far as is possible. And if I have detained any money from any man, I will that my relations repay it. I will that those to whom I have bequeathed my bocland shall never after their lifetime let it go out of my family, but if so be that they have no children, it must go to my nearest of kin. But I most especially desire that it may remain in the male line as long as one is found worthy of it. My grandfather bequeathed his land to the spear half, and not to the spindle half. If, therefore, I have bestowed any of his possessions on a female, my relations must redeem it, if they will, while she is living, but if not, it can be dealt with as we have before settled. But if they take it, it must be paid for; because those are my heirs to whom I shall give what I have to give as it seems best to me, whether male or female."

It is pleasing to add that Alfred was before his age in the treatment of bondmen. He granted important alleviations to all his bondmen. They were not to be bound to the soil any longer: they were free to transfer their services to any master they chose.

When we look at the bequests of money we are faced with the enormous difficulty of ascertaining the value of money then compared with its value to-day. This difficulty, indeed, runs through the whole of English history down to the present time. For instance, in the year 1700 an income of £100 a year was worth a great deal more than it would be to-day; yet some things are much cheaper. The reasons are manifold: the increased price of certain things, the advance in the manner of living and in the standards of comfort, the creation of new wants and new necessities. So in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when we read that a sheep could be had for a few shillings and a goose for a few pence, we want to know what was meant by a shilling or a penny; what were the standards of comfort; what was meant by rent, by clothing, by fuel, and by all the things which were then wanted for the daily life. We want to know exactly what a craftsman required for a "living wage." This can be ascertained pretty well for the Plantagenet period, but for the ninth century, so far as I know, it cannot be ascertained. Another point is the plenty or the scarcity of coin; where there is little money in circulation a great deal of trade is carried on by exchange —taxes and dues are payable in kind—and an extraordinary value is attached to money. So that when we read of a sum of £100 bequeathed

by Alfred to each of his daughters we are almost wholly in the dark as to the value and the meaning of the bequest. It is sufficient for us to know that in the condition of Wessex at that time it represented a comparatively large sum of money according to the modern value.

It is the purpose—the wise and patriotic purpose, of certain persons to erect, for these and other reasons, a monument, visible to all, to the memory of King Alfred.

Some of the points which I have recalled in this paper may help to show why such a monument would have been fitting at any time during the last thousand years. There is, however, a special reason which makes the erection of such a monument very necessary—I use the word necessary advisedly—at the present time. In the year 1897, on that memorable day when we were all drunk with the visible glory and the greatness of the Empire, there arose in the minds of many a feeling that we ought to teach the people the meaning of what we saw set forth in that procession—the meaning of our Empire, not only what it is, but how it came, through whose creation, by whose foundation. Now, so much is Alfred the Founder that every ship in our navy might have his name, every school his bust, every guildhall his statue. He is everywhere. But he is invisible. And the people do not know him. The boys do not learn about him. There is nothing to show him. We want a monument to Alfred, if only to make the people learn and remember the origin of our Empire, if only that his noble example may be kept before us, to stimulate and to inspire and to encourage.

It seems unnecessary to urge that a monument

to Alfred must be set up in Winchester, and not in London or in Westminster, or anywhere else. In Winchester lies the dust of his ancestors, and of the kings his successors. Thirty-five of his line made Winchester their capital; twenty were buried in the cathedral. In this city Alfred received instruction from St. Swithin; the city was already old and venerable when Alfred was a boy. He was buried first in the cathedral, and afterwards in the abbey, which he himself founded, hard by. The name of Alfred's country, well-nigh forgotten, except by scholars, has been revived of late years by a Wessex man, Thomas Hardy. But the name of Alfred's capital continues in the venerable and historic city of Winchester, which yields to none in England for the monuments and the memories of the past.

I venture, lastly, to express my own personal hope that, great as were the achievements of Alfred, the keynote to be struck and to be maintained will be that Alfred is, and will always remain, the typical man of our race—call him Anglo-Saxon, call him American, call him Englishman, call him Australian—the typical man of our race at his best and noblest. I like to think that the face of the Anglo-Saxon at his best and noblest is the face of Alfred. I am quite sure and certain that the mind of the Anglo-Saxon at his best and noblest is the mind of Alfred—that the aspirations, the hopes, the standards of the Anglo-Saxon at his best and noblest are the aspirations, the hopes, the standards of Alfred. He is truly our leader, our founder, our king. When our monument takes shape and form, let it somehow recognize this great, this cardinal fact. Let it show somehow

by the example of Alfred the Anglo-Saxon at his best and noblest—here within the circle of the narrow seas or across the ocean, wherever King Alfred's language is spoken, wherever King Alfred's laws prevail, into whatever fair lands of the wide world King Alfred's descendants have penetrated.

KING ALFRED.

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